12 OUTSTANDING STORIES

ARGOSY

AUGUST, 1957

Price in SOUTH AFRICA, AUSTRALIA and NEW ZEALAND
TWO SHILLINGS and THREEPENCE

Gripping New Story by

PAUL GALLICO

JOHN COLLIER

C. S. FORESTER

JOHN WYNDHAM

MICHAEL GILBERT

JOHN KRUSE

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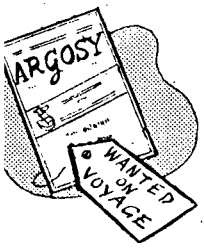


TOUCH AND GO

Summer is here and you're off on a jaunt? You'll need something to suit your holiday mood. A touch of adventure laced with fun, a dash of excitement spiced with love—in fact, you'll want Argosy!

And to prove it, readers, here for you
Is a warning refrain on what Not to do . . .

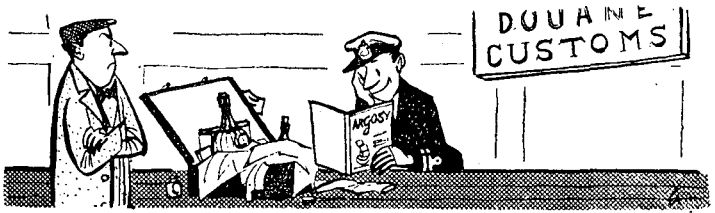
Oolala! quelle horreur, in gay Paree
When your francs run out, quelle folie
Not to have taken ARGOSY

Olé, Olé! if you take your fill
Of bulls and sherry in old Seville
You'll be sorry not to have ARGOSY

Waltzing with a widow in the gay Vienna woods
It's safer, mein Freund, to rely on British goods
So remember to take your ARGOSY

Miles of spaghetti, plain or tomato
In ospedale you're not so ben trovato
If you don't remember your ARGOSY

In the mountains of Bavaria you're a sauerkraut
If you yodel at the local Fraüleins without
Remembering to take your ARGOSY



TAKE HEED: TAKE ARGOSY!

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YOUR PEN CAN PAY FOR YOUR HOLIDAY

Wherever you take your holiday this year, your pen can pay the cost—and more. With paper-rationing nearing its end and travel becoming easier, more and more papers and magazines are interested in articles and stories with a holiday flavour. The mind when in fresh surroundings develops an alertness and stores up material which the trained writer can always use.

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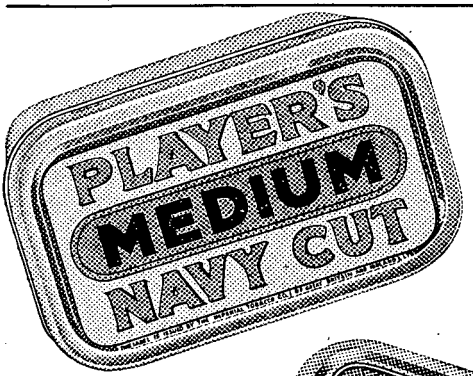

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ARGOSY

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Log Book

IN our young days there were two of them, and they were simply called the cutter-and-binder and the haystack-making machine. Things are different now: the machine that turns up once a year performs so startlingly many functions, awning, clobbing, oscillating, elevating, tedding, teazing, lifting, drying, and threshing, that it can only be called a combine. It is so enormous and complicated that we don't understand how the traditional farmer of fiction can cope with it; no more songs and pranksome mollockings among the straw at harvest, we suspect (in any case the straw nowadays is all baled up in brick-hard bundles): the farmer is grimly busy subduing his Juggernaut.

"Arr," he grunts, oilcan in hand, to a farmhand frowning over the instruction booklet, "where be snifting valve, Hodge? Rustle thee gurt wits and adjust awner and clobber."

"Ee beant 'ere, maister," says Hodge, "thik's nobbut oscillator-compression-ratio changeover valve." He scratches his head and begins to sing, goonishly,

"Oi'll lubricate an' elevate an' oscillate an' separate,
And be a faarmer's bhoy-hoy-hoy,
And be a faarmer's bhoy."

Farmer Giles reads: "The binder mechanism is driven by the shipping pawl (or trip dog), the shipping pinion (trip dog pinion), and a drive to the cam wheel on the knotter shaft. Incorrect functioning of the knotter shaft drive may be caused by a worn trip dog, broken dog spring, or worn rollers on the drive from the packer shaft. It is sometimes possible to correct the trouble by grinding the trip dog into shape."

"Thee'll 'ave R.S.P.C.A. after 'ee, sure as a gun, if thee do that, maister," says Hodge.

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The vast bulk of machinery towers over them, obstinately silent except for an occasional hiss. Large drops of rain are beginning to fall.

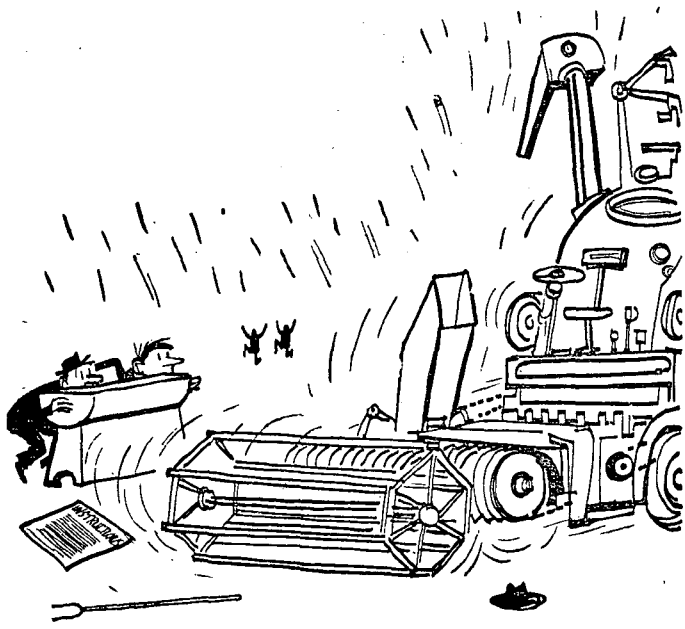
"Be danged to 'ee," shouts the farmer, suddenly hurling the booklet across the yard, "thur's nobbut in 'ee any use to man or beast."

"Arr," says Hodge, sheltering in the barn and pulling a magazine out of his pocket, "thur be summat for everyone in Arrgosy . . ."

We don't know if **Paul Gallico** tells fortunes himself, but we do know that a carnival-ground sets him off story-telling as nothing else: turn to page 7 for a new light on what the palmist sees when he looks at the Line of Venus.

John Collier can chill readers' blood in a variety of ways. In his latest story, which contains neither fiends nor cannibals, there is one of the most starkly appalling moments we have yet come across.

John Wyndham, whose new novel *The Midwich Cuckoos* comes out in the autumn, is at present holidaying in Madeira. His



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theory is that islands *do* something for writers ; look, he says, at J. B. Priestley—or, of course, Sappho. We only hope that the Kraken doesn't come up out of the sea and bite him.

C. S. Forester, whose disconcerting little story we print on page 19, is best known as the creator of Hornblower. A tall, thin, pleasant man of fifty-eight, Forester turned from medicine to writing at the age of twenty, having failed to identify a single bone in the human body in his finals at Guy's. He plans his books to the last detail while lying in bed, writes them in long-hand at the rate of a thousand words a day. Nowadays Forester lives in America; his novel *The Gun* is at present being filmed in Spain, starring Cary Grant.

E. L. Malpass two years ago won the Observer short-story competition with a wild piece of science fiction, has just produced a novel *Beefy Jones*, in which the hero inhabits a church hall and pines for a pig. Mr. Malpass, in fact, likes to keep well to windward of real life in his fiction, maybe because he himself has a staid existence as bank cashier and secretary to his parish council.

This month we offer readers a new **Kruse** with a whale in view (no pun intended), and new summer reading from favourite writers **Gilbert** and **Manhood**. We won't delay you any longer from plunging in . . .

JOHN SILVER

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CROSS MY HAND

"I see a diamond ring," he said
"and a woman . . ."

BY PAUL GALLICO

ONE late-summer day at the turn of the century, a cheap carnival came to a small town in Kansas for the county fair, in time to relieve some of the tensions built up by the brutal murder of an innocent widow on a lonely farm and the forthcoming execution of the farmhand who had been found guilty of the crime.

The morning of the day the fair was to open in Thackerville, the carnival boss, Bowers, strode about the busy fairground where the side-shows were being knocked together—the Ferris wheel and giant swing, freak shows and girl shows, the hoop-la games, wheels of fortune, and coconut shies—and bawled, "Hoi! Gather round, all hands. The Sheriff wants everybody."

At that moment the curtains parted at the booth where a garish poster hung, showing a turbaned Indian gazing into a crystal ball: SWAMI MIRZA BABA TELLS THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE—Nick Jackson strolled out of the booth, spitting a stream of tobacco juice.

He was an unkempt, friendless, lonely man, past sixty and looking older, with a grey, seamed face and small, red-rimmed eyes. Hard-boiled, irreverent, he had the cynicism of a man whose lifetime had been spent in city slums and around cheap burlesque shows, travelling circuses, fun fairs, and carnivals.

He had been tout, barker, spot-the-lady operator, card palmer, and confidence trickster, but age and drink had made him unreliable and he had ended up "dukkerin," as the Romany gipsies called fortune-telling.

"All right now, you rats, listen to me," the Sheriff began his address. He was a big man with a good forehead and hard, clear eyes. He wore a snakeskin belt and ten-gallon hat, and his neck rose from his flannel shirt like the trunk of a cottonwood tree. "This is a hard-working community of decent God-fearing people. We're a-goin' to let you operate here as long as you behave. I know you for what you are, a pack o' thieves, rascals, and scallawags. But you ain't goin' to get away with anything here. I got my eye on all of you."

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Nobody in the group of carnival men stirred or said anything, but the old fortune-teller spat again.

"You wheel-of-fortune men, keep away from nudging them brakes and lever boards. You cheat anybody and you'll spend the next six months in gaol. That goes for you hoop-la fellers, too."

The racketeers exchanged looks but said nothing. They were wondering just how far they could go and yet stay on the right side of the law. The Sheriff was pleased with the effect of his speech on everybody except the fortune-teller. The hot impudence and contempt in the man's eyes irritated him. He said, "You Swami there, or whatever your name is. I don't know that I'm a-gonna let you work."

The old man regarded him unblinkingly and said out of the side of his tobacco-stained mouth, "Why not? What's the matter with me?"

"You're a fake. You can't read no minds and you can't predict no future. Let's see you predict mine, if you can."

Nick said, "Cough up first, the same as anybody else."

The Sheriff reached into his pocket and flung a coin to the fortune-teller, who caught it and snarled, "You want a prediction, eh? Couple of months from now you won't be Sheriff any more."

There was a roar of laughter from the assembled carnival men.

The Sheriff's eyes hardened. "Is that so? What makes you think that?"

With an election coming off in November, it was a good fifty-fifty chance and maybe better, Nick knew. He had spent the previous day in Thackerville lounging around the barber's shop, the bars, and the general store, listening to gossip and picking up stray bits of information that might come in handy.

Now he replied, "You got a hangin' comin' off next week. How do you know you're stringin' up the right feller?"

The Sheriff flushed red and stood silent for a moment on the bandstand. "You watch yourselves," was all he said finally. He climbed down and strode away, shouldering roughly through the carnival men. Nick merely spat again.

The whole town, he had found out, was still on edge over the murder a month ago of the widow Booth, discovered in the kitchen of her farm with her head beaten in by a poker, and over the death sentence passed on Erd Wayne, her hired man, who had been found wandering about the kitchen, half-dazed, with the murder weapon in his hand and blood on his clothes.

Wayne had been tried and found guilty when banker Samuel

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Chinter had supplied evidence for the motive, testifying that he had refused Wayne the loan of $1,500 to buy the Coulter farm that was up for sale. There had long been rumours that the widow kept that amount, her late husband's insurance, in the house in cash. But, testified banker Chinter, the widow actually kept her money in the bank and so the murderer would have got no more than a few dollars for his crime.

Wayne's defence had been lame. He had been about to enter the kitchen for supper, he had said, when he was struck from behind and remembered nothing more.

It was, as the Sheriff had said, an open-and-shut case, and it had been conducted vigorously by the county prosecutor who hoped to reach the state legislature via the conviction. A lot of people, however, had liked Erd Wayne. Some said he wanted the farm so that he could ask June Purvey to marry him, but was not the kind to stoop to murder to get it. Still, the evidence seemed conclusive and sometimes fellows in love lost their heads. One never knew . . .

" Clodhoppers," muttered Nick Jackson, eyeing the teeming fairground from the entrance to his booth. He wore a soiled dressing-gown now, with stars and moons sewn onto it, and a turban with shaving-brush bristles and a sixpenny diamond stuck in the front of it.

He gave readings automatically. " A dark man is coming into your life . . . You have been worried lately, but things will get better . . . Beware of a blonde woman . . . You are a sensitive type, misunderstood by your family."

The curtains to the booth parted, admitting the next customer, a young girl in a white cotton frock tied with a blue sash. Her dark hair, worn long, was gathered back and tied with a ribbon of the same colour. She was eighteen or so, shy, nervous, frightened. But what startled the fortune-teller most as his shrewd eyes analysed her, missing nothing, was her innocence.

" Are you Mirza Baba? " she asked.

" Yes."

" Can I have a reading? "

" Twenty-five cents."

She opened her purse. He always made them pay first. A glance into a handbag yielded valuable clues. He saw the snapshot of the young man in an open-neck shirt. She handed him the money.

" You are worried about someone near and dear to you." A safe opening—her nervousness, the snapshot . . .

Her dark eyes opened wide and she stared at him, amazed. Tears formed in them. " I'm June Purvey," she said.

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" I knew that," the old man lied. He scrutinized her with renewed interest. Hers was a simple, dewy beauty and it made his heart ache unaccountably to look at her. Unaccustomed to emotion and pain, he suddenly turned savage and said harshly, " They're a-goin' to hang your man . . ."

The girl gave a low cry of despair, put her head down on the table, and sobbed uncontrollably. Nick was used to clients dissolving into tears when he prodded them on the raw or guessed their secrets. Yet the grief of this child touched him.

He hedged, " . . . Unless something happens to prevent it."

The girl lifted her tear-stained face and clutched miserably at the straw. " Oh please, Mr. Baba, help me. Please. He didn't do it. Look here—you can see he didn't do it." She opened her bag and presented the photograph.

The odd thing was that at that moment, with the snapshot in his grimy fingers, Nick would have betted that Erd Wayne was innocent. His occupation had trained him to read faces instantly. Life in a sordid world more black than white had taught him all the telltale marks left by greed, vice, hatred, and malice. The face of the man in the picture was frank, open, and honest.

" That's right," he agreed, " he didn't do it. I can see that."

" Then won't you help him, please, Mr. Baba? I'll pay you. I've brought money . . ." She opened her bag again and produced a wad of notes that made the old man's eyes light up with cupidity.

" It's eighty-five dollars that I've saved. But I would pay you more—anything you wanted. I could send you some every week. I work at Pete's shop."

" You Erd's girl? " Nick asked.

June shook her head. " No . . ." And then added, " He ain't spoken yet."

" What you doin' this for, then? "

" Because I love him."

Nick was unable to understand the depth or simplicity of her reply. To him love was desire. He said, " Supposing he was to get off and go flirtin' with someone else, hey? "

June regarded him miserably for a moment, then replied fiercely, " I wouldn't care, as long as he was alive! " She pushed the money towards him. " You could find out the truth," she said. " You can read their minds. Nobody can hide anything from you. If the murderer came in here you'd know."

" Yes, I'd know."

" Then take it." She indicated the notes.

Nick said, " Gimme half. You can pay the rest when I find something out." He counted out forty dollars and then added the odd five-dollar bill. He had no compunction in taking her

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money. This was how he earned his living, separating the gullible from their cash. It surprised him, though, that he had not taken it all.

He said, " I'll keep my inner eye peeled. Don't say nothing to nobody. You can come back tomorrow."

She got up to go. Her eyes were filled with trust and relief. " Oh, thank you, Mr. Baba. God bless you! "

He watched her go, suddenly filled with a strange angry desire to free the hired man Wayne.

Nick Jackson was what was known as a cold reader. With no props such as cards or crystal ball, he sat at a table and dissected his clients, probed them for their weaknesses and hidden troubles. He employed a combination of ready patter, shrewd observation, knowledge of human nature and evil, and the natural desire of his victims to talk.

" Some men cannot resist the impulse to have just one more drink," he would say to some unhappy housewife with bitter lines about her mouth, watching her face for clues. If the lips tightened, the eyes widened with a hint of tears, he had the secret of her visit. If the expression remained blank he continued smoothly, " But that, fortunately, is not the case with your husband."

Then he would fish in other waters, blondes, cards, the race track . . . Soon they would be spilling everything to him, convinced that he had read their innermost thoughts and secrets.

The afternoon of the next day, a young girl came in. But she was not innocent. Nick could tell when they had had experience.

His knowing eyes sized her up. Straw-coloured hair, small greedy mouth, good clothes. When she opened her bag to pay him he glimpsed a rouge compact and a diamond ring, the stub of a railway ticket to Kansas City, and a scrap of paper with the address, in masculine handwriting, of one of that city's shadier hotels. It was as though she had presented her immediate history to him written down in a copybook.

He said, " Sit down, dear." He thought of the Sheriff and his hard-working community of decent God-fearing people, and laughed inwardly. " You are the affectionate type; your warm generous nature gives you away. I see someone who loves you. But wait. I see another woman at his side. The man is married, is he not? "

The girl's eyes filled with fear. " How did you know? "

" Nothing is veiled from Mirza Baba. Shall I tell you more? " From outside sounded the loud cries of the barkers, " Walk up! Walk up! " and the groaning of the merry-go-round organ, and

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the snapping of the cheap rifles in the nearby shooting-gallery.

The girl nodded silently.

" I see a train journey. You are alone and nervous. You are walking along a street in a big city. You come to a hotel. There you meet your lover. The two of you go inside . . ."

The girl's moan interrupted him; she appeared on the point of collapse. " Oh God, you've found out. My father will kill me if *he* finds out."

Her story came pouring from her. Her name was Clytie Vroom. A much older married man in the town had fallen in love with her. She had wanted pretty things. He had given her a diamond ring, which she had never dared wear, and other gifts. He had painted a glowing picture of the wonderful time they would have together in the big city, and she couldn't resist his invitation to spend a weekend there with him. She had told her father she was going to visit a girl-friend in a neighbouring village.

Nick was doing arithmetic. The ring must have cost nearly a thousand dollars, the other gifts several hundred. Where would a man in a small town lay his hands on that kind of money without his wife or someone finding out?

He asked, " What was his name, dear? " It was a mistake. If he had kept quiet or prodded her some more, it would have slipped out.

She was on her feet, her little mouth twisted with fear, her eyes wide with terror. " You'll find out if I stay here any more. You'll read it in my mind . . ." She snatched up her bag and fled from the booth.

Nick went to the entrance and watched her panicky passage through the fairground. He gazed at the mingling of farmers and villagers out for a holiday. He wondered what other secrets there were to be dredged out from behind those bland, smooth faces, what other guilts smouldered beneath denim, seersucker, dimity, or poplin.

He saw June Purvey standing down by the ice-cream stall, her dark, unhappy eyes trying to catch his. She probably had been waiting there all day, watching.

Nick signalled to June Purvey with a jerk of his head and went back inside. A moment later she came in. She plucked at his soiled dressing-gown, crying, " Oh Mr. Baba . . . have you found out who did it? " Her voice shook with strain and anguish.

He replied, " No," and then quickly corrected himself. " Maybe. The psychical aura is kinda confused. I gotta git more impressions. I see a figure but there is a veil in front of it." Then, abruptly changing his tone, " You know a girl named Clytie Vroom? "

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June nodded, puzzled. "Yes. I went to school with her."

"Know who her feller is?"

June thought for a moment. "I don't think she has one—a steady, I mean." She blushed suddenly. "I think maybe the Sheriff is sweet on her. I've seen him walking her home from the bank several times. Clytie works at the bank, you know." Then June drew in her breath sharply, crying, "Oh, but—"

"The Sheriff's married," concluded Nick. "Never mind; it probably don't mean nothing. Maybe she was carrying some money. You run along. I'll let you know if I hear anything."

The next day was Sunday and unbearably hot. Although the fairground was crowded, Nick gave only a few desultory readings and mostly sat waiting in the stifling booth rolling cigarettes, thinking of the man in the county gaol waiting to be hanged by the neck until he was dead and wondering if it could really be pinned onto the Sheriff. He daydreamed with vicious satisfaction of unmasking the man who had called them all rats and scoundrels, and had singled him out for abuse.

Towards late afternoon Nick heard voices outside the curtain across the entrance and pricked up his ears. Many workable clues could be mined by listening to the snatches of talk between two people before one of them came in, from "Aw, I dare you," and "I will if you will," to such admissions as "Jim would be furious if he knew I had gone to a fortune-teller," exposing the timid wife and the domineering husband.

A woman's voice said: "Vulgar fraud. It oughtn't to be allowed."

The man's: "Oh, I suppose it's amusing. I have rather a mind to see just how far these fakes go."

The woman, with a snort: "Really, Mr. C. If you can't find something better to spend hard-earned money on . . ."

The man: "Maybe he'll tell me how to invest and make a fortune."

The woman: "Samuel Chinter! That I should live to see the day when you patronized a fortune-teller."

And the man, finally: "My dear Essie, I see that you are still far from plumbing the more tortuous depths of my character. If you are embarrassed, wait for me outside."

Nick noted mentally: *Business man, but his wife holds one end of the purse strings. Would probably enjoy a fling if he could get it.* And he was trying to remember where he had heard the name before. Then it came to him as the curtain parted. Samuel Chinter, manager of the local bank, came in.

He sat down opposite the seedy-looking little man in the gown and ridiculous turban. His thin mouth parted in an amiable

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enough smile as he asked, " Can you make money out of this sort of thing, my friend? "

Nick replied, " Yes, or I wouldn't be doing it." He was studying the tight, too-smooth face.

The banker's skin looked as though it were made of elastic and had been stretched over wood. He noted the lines at either corner of the bloodless mouth and the gleam in the small, butternut-shaped eyes.

" Well then, Mirza Baba, if that is your name, supposing you tell me something about myself? "

Nick said, " Twenty-five cents," and waited, watching while the banker took a leather wallet from his left hip pocket. This surprised Nick, for most men carry their wallets on the right. Chinter laid the coin on the table, saying, " Always the best course in any business. Trust no one."

Nick decided he wanted to be rid of him quickly. He said perfunctorily, " I see an office of marble and glass. There is a large mahogany desk. A sign on the door says, *Manager*."

" Excellent, my friend. Of course, you know who I am. Everyone in Thackerville does. Go on."

Nick felt at a loss. His mind was not working as coldly and analytically as it should. " You are worried about investments," he suggested, picking up the clue.

Chinter's lips parted again, but this time the smile was not amiable. " Every banker worries about investments," he said. " But if I wanted financial information I wouldn't come to you. Is that the best you can do? "

The anger he always seemed to feel against these bland, self-satisfied, well-to-do people possessed Nick. " There is an account at the bank that is causing you concern." That was safe enough: every bank had at least one account like that. " You do not know how to get out of your difficulty at the moment. Also in this affair you are hindered by a woman." It was also true that in most tangled accounts where there was an overdraft, there was a woman involved.

Chinter's smooth face remained expressionless. But in the hairless space between nostril and lip line, Nick saw a bead of sweat which had not been there before.

He switched to flattery.

" You are the sophisticated, worldly type, too big for a small community. You belong where your talents would be more appreciated. You have a fatal attraction for women—young women. You are held back by people who do not understand you."

He was watching the man closely through half-closed eyes as

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he reeled off the routine patter he had given half a dozen others. Almost imperceptibly, he saw Chinter's head nodding in agreement with each point. "Your heart rules your head. You are generous to a fault. You . . ."

He paused, suddenly remembering something that June Purvey had said—*Clytie works at the bank, you know* . . . A hunch! But if he could make this sneering man squirm a little . . .

Nick fixed the banker hypnotically with his red-rimmed eyes and continued, "I see a ring. A diamond ring in the hands of a blonde woman, a young girl . . ." Had there been no reaction to this he would have said, "but this does not concern you."

But there were now three beads of sweat on the mouth and one coursing down the chin.

Nick gambled. "The diamond ring is a present. Yet she dare not wear it. I see her on a train. She is nervous. There is an address in her bag. I cannot read it clearly, but it is the name of a hotel in Kansas City."

He stopped. Chinter did not move. "Go on," he said hoarsely. "What else do you know?"

Bull's-eye! Clytie Vroom, then, had gone to her married lover in panic and told him the mind reader had learnt her secret. But why had he come there when Clytie had not named him? What else did he fear? With what other guilt was he burdened?

Nick remembered June Purvey saying, *If the murderer came here, you'd know it.* But Chinter was the one man who could not have committed the murder for which Erd Wayne was to hang, since he knew that the widow Booth kept her money in his bank and not in her house. Therefore . . .

But Nick's sordid, cynical mind was spinning now like the drive wheel of a locomotive, as it weighed, tested, remembered. Figures flashed through his head, the sum of $1,500, the widow's fortune—enough to buy a diamond ring and other gifts. Who would have easier access to it than Chinter? He had only to take it. *But if the widow had found out* . . .

The atmosphere in the booth was suddenly thick and heavy with animal fear as Nick droned, "I see the woman who hindered you with the account that was giving you difficulty. She will hinder you no longer. She is dead."

"Aaaaaah!" A long sigh came from the man on the other side of the table. His right hand dropped casually to his side.

"I see the widow Booth in her kitchen. Outside there lurks a man who must silence her at all costs. The hired man, Wayne, enters, disturbing his plans. But the man outside sees in him the chance to kill and let another hang for it. *And I know why the murderer had to silence the widow—*"

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The explosion of the gun burst shockingly over the fairground noises and filled the narrow booth with black smoke and powder stink.

The bullet passed harmlessly through the roof, however, for Nick had seen the glint of metal creeping from the hip pocket, and had kicked viciously under the table, spoiling his aim.

Then he kicked him twice more in the same spot, disabling him into a grovelling wreck on the floor as a crowd of carnival people and passers-by, led by the ubiquitous Sheriff, rushed in.

The Sheriff shouted, " I warned you to keep out of trouble. By God, it's Mr. Chinter! You'll swing for this, Baba . . ."

The old man stared at him. " You're mighty quick with that rope, Sheriff. He's got the gun, not me."

Bowers, the carnival boss, had arrived. " Yeah, Sheriff, take it easy. This fellow, whoever he is, tried to murder one of my men."

Nick began to laugh, a horrid, high-pitched cackle. " Rats, are we? " he gasped, " thieves, rascals, scallawags, eh? You'll keep an eye on us! What about that sweet-smelling innocent there? There's your real murderer of the widow Booth. Are you or aren't you, Chinter? " and he raised his foot again.

The wreck moaned, " Yes. Oh God, don't kick me again."

Nick croaked on, " He embezzled the widow's funds to buy his doxy a diamond and other things. Go ask Clytie Vroom to show you the ring. When the widow discovered by accident that her money was gone he had to kill her to keep her quiet."

Then he added, " You're through, Sheriff. You hang too fast in this county." He touched the prone man with his foot and said, " Go on. Get that out of here."

The Sheriff and his prisoner withdrew, with the crowd following them silently. Nick Jackson began to set his booth to rights.

He fingered the hole in the roof made by the .38-calibre bullet and grinned. Lack of courage was not one of his failings. He readjusted his turban which had fallen awry in the brief mêlée, and sat down looking moodily before him.

The curtain stirred and parted, admitting June Purvey. She was white, but her eyes were shining with joy. She said, " I heard what happened—what you did. They told me they're a-goin' to set Erd free tomorrow."

Nick grunted. In the excitement of the shooting he had forgotten all about the girl and the man she loved. Then he made a strange admission. " You helped," he said. " Erd owes you a lot. It was you who told me Clytie worked in the bank."

She said swiftly, " I'd never let him know."

Nick said, " Mirza Baba reads the future. Erd's your man."

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Tears fell from the lovely eyes again. She opened her bag and took out the forty dollars.

"It's all I've got," she said, "but I could send you a dollar a week for as long as you say."

Nick looked at the money and at the girl. "All right," he said, "gimme it." He took it from her. "You don't need to pay any more. We're square."

June cried, "Oh, thank you, thank you, dear Mr. Baba!"

Then, going to him, she put her arms about him and kissed him on the side of his bitter, tobacco-stained mouth and, turning quickly, ran from the booth.

He remained sitting there, the wad of notes in one hand. With the fingers of the other he touched the spot that she had kissed, rubbing at it as though the imprint of such goodness, purity, and innocence were something searing and unbearable. He felt older and more in need of a drink than he ever had before and, for the first time in his life, strangely desolate and forlorn.

★ ★ ★

ALL ABOARD

Travel, they say, broadens the mind, and armchair travel is presumably the next most broadening thing, so, fauteuil de mieux, let's get out our pencils for the round trip to Mandalay via South Mimms. Solutions on page 99.

1. *Can you say who a. went travelling with a donkey; b. voyaged on the Beagle; c. made the golden journey to Samarkand; d. went round the world in eighty days*
2. *Ship, car, train, or plane—can you identify the following:*
   i. the Silver Jubilee ii. the Bluebird
   iii. the Golden Hind iv. the Cutty Sark
   v. the Yankee Clipper
3. *Who said, He travels the fastest who travels alone?*
4. *Who were the first passengers to travel in a balloon?*
5. *Name the author of the following definition of a commuter:*
   Commuter—one who spends his life
   In riding to and from his wife;
   A man who shaves and takes a train,
   And then rides back to shave again.
6. *"Better 50 m.p.h. in Europe than a cycle in Cathay." Something wrong with this quotation, can you locate the mistakes? And whose is it?*
7. *What snowbound traveller tied his horse to a tree and found next day that it had been a church all along? Who wrote up his experiences?*

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ICE PIE

Bricks without straw

Ice-cream cones take a watchful eye,
Permit no lapse or lagging.
Around, around, first low, then high,
The busy tongue keeps wagging.

The eater's eye and tongue must team,
He's beaten if he lingers.
To win, he has to lick the cream,
Or, losing, lick his fingers.

RICHARD ARMOUR, *Ice-Cream Cones*

When buying ice-cream,
I'd feel a lot safer
If I knew which held more
A cone or a wafer.

G. IRWIN, *Dilemma*

I was several days at Paris which looked more riant and pretty than ever—the weather delightful—the boulevards thronged and people eating ices outside the cafés at 11 O'clock at night as if they were in Italy.

Letter from Lord Clarendon,
October 21, 1858

Lollie, sundae, tub or brick,
Suck or scoop or chip or lick,
This against the lot I hold—
One and all they're too damn cold.

NICHOLAS DEE

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OUT OF THE QUESTION

"Tell us more about it, dear" said Arabella, brightly

BY C. S. FORESTER

JENNINGS was an electronic engineer employed by Electric Subsidiaries Ltd. He was explaining at dinner the work to which he had persuaded his employers to assign him.

"They've handed the two old computers over to me," he said. "I'd sooner start afresh, but I suppose I'm lucky anyway."

"And what are you going to do with them?" asked Arabella, his wife, showing as much interest as she could.

"I'm going to use them in two stages of integration," went on Jennings. "I think there might be some interesting results."

"How do you mean?" asked Babcock—he was dining with the Jenningses, as he usually did two or three times a week.

"With two stages of integration the process will be necessarily slower," said Jennings heavily. "But the results may be on a far higher scale of accuracy and over a far wider range; it should be the product, and not the sum, of the two stages."

"Clear enough to you perhaps, old man," said Babcock, "but remember I'm no mathematical genius."

"Tell us more about it, dear," said Arabella, with no appearance of resignation.

"It should be possible to obtain reasonably accurate answers to more general questions than usual," explained Jennings. "It's a matter largely of the correct selection of the data to be fed in. With proper selectivity there might be solutions to problems of everyday life as well as to mathematical equations."

"That doesn't really sound like you, dear," said Arabella.

"Could you pick a winner at Goodwood?" asked Babcock.

"I thought you might ask that," replied Jennings. "It's a question of the relevant data, as I said. In horse-racing the number of unknowns is kept deliberately high. And there are the unpredictables as well, the state of the weather and the condition of the track. With the unknowns outweighing the certain data the result would be hardly more satisfactory than your guess

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—or mine, for that matter." Jennings smiled at Babcock with wintry politeness.

"It doesn't seem as though you're going to do much good then," said Arabella.

"Perhaps not. I've been associated with failures before," said Jennings, turning the same rather wintry smile on his wife. "But negative results have their value, you know, dear. It may be worth trying."

"How long before you get results, old man?" asked Babcock.

"One never knows. Months—weeks—perhaps even a few days will be enough to prove if I'm on the right track. Those two computers need a good deal of adjustment in any case. Then I can run some test propositions."

"And you'll be working Saturdays and Sundays, I suppose?" said Arabella. "You always are."

"If you can spare me, dear," said Jennings.

It was only a matter of weeks afterwards that Arabella and Babcock were sitting by the window having a drink before dinner.

"Here he comes," said Arabella, watching the car swing into the garage. "We'll have to ask about that old computer. He was going to make it work today."

"Well, I'll listen," said Babcock.

Jennings came in, treading heavily like a very weary man. He looked stooped and much older.

"Well, dear," asked Arabella brightly, "did you get that old computer going?"

"Yes," said Jennings. He looked from one to the other of them but added nothing to that single word.

"Did you ask the thing any questions?" asked Babcock.

"Yes," said Jennings.

"Did you get any results?"

"Yes."

"What ever's the matter, dear?" asked Arabella.

"I only asked one question," said Jennings. "And I received the answer I did not want."

It was then that Arabella saw the gun in his hand.

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CUTTING REJOINDER

Once Mark Twain wished to borrow a book from a neighbour, an eminent bibliophile. The man told him, "You may consult it in my library but I cannot let you take it away." Later the booklover asked to borrow Mark Twain's lawn-mower, and he replied, "Certainly, but you must use it in *my* garden."

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LOVESICK LORELEI

" Lost her comb, maybe," said Grandma

BY E. L. MALPASS

LINCOLNSHIRE disappeared almost overnight; Norfolk in the passing of a day. With a great sizzling and hissing of steam the industrial Midlands went down before the flood. The lovely Malverns became islands, died. One by one the proud hills of Wales were drowned in the rising sea.

On the top of Snowdon stood Grandpa Llewellyn, busily pushing the English back into the sea with a boat-hook. Happy as a sandboy Grandma Llewellyn was, too, brewing tea for the survivors in the boiler of the Snowdon Mountain Railway engine.

Old Llewellyn approached a bald head that was bobbing about in the sea. " What is your name and where you from? " he shouted.

" John Smith, of Guildford," panted the swimmer.

With practised hand Grandpa applied the boat-hook. He pushed. The head disappeared.

Sadly the old man watched the rising bubbles.

" Poor feller. Not his fault he was born English, is it? " he muttered sympathetically.

Know-all Jenkins came up. " Chap round the other side with black hair," he said. " Welsh, could be."

Old Llewellyn went round to the other side. " What is your name and where you from? " he shouted.

Pale face, dark eyes looked at him from the sea. " Trevor Williams, of Penrhyndeudedd, tenor," the swimmer called.

Llewellyn reached out a hand, and pulled. " Welcome to the Principality," he said kindly. " Bit short of tenors, we are."

A word about Llewellyn. Tall and spare he was, with a silky white beard. And wrapped up in the music, see. Give him a choice of steak-and-kidney pie or ten minutes of *Elijah*, and he'd choose the oratorio every time, Grandma used to say. So at this moment of crisis he had one thought only in his mind; to get together as much musical talent as possible.

Unfortunately no one else seemed really interested. All too busy getting together their belongings and drying their bedding and worrying about food. Know-all Jenkins was the worst of the

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lot, dashing about like a scalded cat, minding everyone's business for them. A thin-faced, miserable chap, this Know-all. Grandpa Llewellyn didn't take to him.

The great ball of the sun rolled into the sea. The waves splashed and slapped the rocky face of Snowdon. Quiet now, the survivors sat and watched the stars being lit one by one. Sweetly the voice of Trevor Williams behind the hill was singing *The Ash Grove*. Other voices joined in. The Mountain Railway engine simmered like a kettle on the hob.

" Funny to think this is now the British Isles," said Grandpa Llewellyn.

" A few Scotsmen perched on Ben Nevis, maybe," pointed out Know-all Jenkins.

Grandma Llewellyn pulled her shawl about her shoulders. " Bit chilly round the knees they will be, then," she said.

Silence, and *The Ash Grove*, and the lapping sea.

" Wonder what caused it," Grandpa said.

" A great upheaval on the sea bed," said Know-all Jenkins.

" Grandma thinks all this coal-mining have undermined the foundations," Llewellyn said.

" Stands to reason," Grandma explained. " Always knew it would happen sooner or later. A great pity it is, anyway. Just before the National Eisteddfod, too."

Know-all Jenkins stood up briskly. " Well, whatever caused it, we must be organized," he said firmly. " Let us make an inventory of all we have."

Grandpa Llewellyn began ticking an inventory off on his fingers. " The score of *Elijah* is in my luggage. Griffiths the Euphonium have brought his euphonium. And Bronwen Owen her harp. Two strings broken, though. Very unfortunate."

" It is of food and drink I am thinking," Know-all said coldly.

" Plenty of tea in the boiler," Grandma said with satisfaction. " And five hundred tins of baked beans Price the Provisions have brought."

" Plenty of fish in the sea," joined in Trevor.

" Gone off fish, Grandma has," Llewellyn said. " Ever since Dai Plaice sold her some bad."

They relapsed into thought. Dark now, and a straight silver road on the sea that led to the rising moon. " Wrap up your throats, men," called Grandpa Llewellyn. " Bad for a singing voice it is, sleeping on a mountain."

The seventy survivors settled down for the night, snuggled against the railway engine for warmth.

The dawn came, with a golden road leading across the sea to the rising sun. Grandma looked to the north, but there was no

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sign of the Scotsmen on Ben Nevis. Bit misty it was, see . . .

And the days passed, and the sea birds came and looked at the survivors and flew away. But whatever had caused the inundation, it must have shaken up the ocean bed proper. Sea serpents were two a penny. Monsters from the deep, never before seen by human eye, kept popping up all round Snowdon. Better than the Dinas Botanical Gardens and Aquarium, Grandma said it was.

Meanwhile, despite the prevailing apathy, Grandpa Llewellyn worked hard. At the end of a week he said proudly, " Organized proper we are now. A Male Voice Choir such as I have never heard, and a competition for a Bardic Ode, and the rudiments of a Brass Band."

" And umpteen tins of baked beans," said Know-all, nasty.

Grandpa Llewellyn glared at him. " Better employed you would be concocting a Bardic Ode than engaged in destructive criticism," he thundered.

Unabashed Know-all was. " Fishing it is, for me," he muttered, and went off in a huff. Grandpa sighed with relief at his going.

" Do *Elijah* if we had a soprano," he said wistfully. He had discovered that, despite his efforts, the survivors were musically unbalanced. He had given auditions to all the ladies, and not one of them was equal to the oratorio. He looked forlorn.

Grandma tried to encourage him. " Take your boat as far as Ben Nevis," she suggested. " Plenty of sopranos there, maybe."

Grandpa turned on her fiercely. " No good going to Ben Nevis. I want an oratorio soprano, not a *Comin' Through the Rye* soprano."

Grandma gave up. The old gentleman went and sat by the sea, and pondered what seemed an insoluble problem.

And when night came he even dreamt about it. There he was, in the Dinas Baptist Chapel, listening to the sweetest soprano singing he had ever heard; and then, suddenly, he realized that he wasn't in the Dinas Baptist Chapel. He wasn't even dreaming. He was awake, on the cold hillside; but the singing of his dream still went on.

Grandpa Llewellyn arose, and began to grope his way about the summit. One of the lady survivors must have had a cold at the audition, he decided, but now her voice was in full flower again.

Yet why should she sing at midnight, in the dark of the moon? Besides, now that he thought about it, there was an unearthly quality about the singing. Unutterably sweet though it was, it

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did not sound quite human. And there was no tune that you could quite put your finger on.

Grandpa Llewellyn stumped round Snowdon. At one moment he thought the music came from the very summit; then it seemed to come from the sea, but from whereabouts in the sea he could not say. The singing went on.

Grandpa shook his stick in the direction from which, at the moment, it seemed to be coming. "Have you singing at the Albert Hall in six months, my girl," he muttered. "If I could find you, and if the Albert Hall wasn't under three thousand feet of water," he added wistfully.

The song ended before dawn. As soon as breakfast was finished Grandpa lined up the lady survivors. "Who was singing all through the night?" he asked.

At his side Know-all Jenkins nudged him and asked, "Do you mean, 'Who was singing all through the night?' or do you mean, 'Who was singing *All Through the Night*?'"

Irritated by Know-all, Grandpa was, and not for the first time. Ignored him, he did. "Who was singing?" he repeated.

No one spoke. Grandpa waited. At last: "Did anyone hear the singing, then?" he inquired.

Yes, indeed. Everyone had heard it. Bronwen Owen put it all down to angels. Somebody with a wireless, said Mrs. Edwards.

"A Lorelei, could be," suggested Know-all.

"And what is a Lorelei when it's at home?" Grandpa asked coldly.

"Brazen hussies. Find them in Germany," Know-all began.

"But not in Wales," Grandpa said firmly.

The mystery was unsolved. The next night Grandpa lay awake, strangely excited. Sure enough, the singing began at the turn of the tide. There could be no doubt now. It came from the sea, sweet, and lonely, and clear.

Grandpa went down to the water's edge, and peered into the heaving waves. Did he see the gleam of a wet shoulder, the flick of a fishy tail? He could never be sure. But he had left everything ready. He stepped into his boat and pushed off quietly, and rowed with strong, slow strokes.

They were finishing breakfast when he returned. He tied up the boat and strode ashore, carrying something that squirmed and wriggled in a great net. Gently he laid his burden at Grandma's feet, and carefully opened the net.

"There, Mother," he said. "The finest soprano in the Principality—I am hoping."

Know-all Jenkins looked scornfully at the newcomer.

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"Who ever heard of a mermaid singing in *Elijah*?" he asked.

But Grandma was already hurrying to the Mountain Railway. "Poor little thing," she murmured. "Looks half frozen. Get her a nice cup of tea, I will."

She was only a little mermaid, with thin shoulders like a child, and soft, vague hands. And she just cried and cried and cried.

"Not so much as a chirp you will get out of her, I am thinking," said Know-all, smug as you please.

"Lost her comb, maybe, the little dear," said Grandma.

So they gave her a cup of tea, and some baked beans, and Grandma lent her a comb, and at last, anxiously watched by all, she retired to a rock and began combing her hair.

And then she started to sing.

Grandpa picked up the *Elijah* score and advanced. But before he could begin giving her a lesson a curious thing happened. The mermaid's gaze became fixed. She faltered in her song, fell silent. She just sat and stared.

Grandpa turned to see what had attracted her attention, but all he could see was Know-all Jenkins. He was puzzled.

He was even more puzzled when the mermaid left her rock and flipped over to Know-all. She put out her soft hands and gently stroked his face. Know-all gave her an astonished look and backed away. She followed, her deep, dark eyes filled with devotion, and wound her white arms round his neck. With a cry Know-all grasped her arms and tore them away. He ran.

Pathetic it was to see the little creature a victim of love at first sight. And for the detestable Know-all, too! Grandma and Grandpa came up to her where she lay sobbing. She gazed at them through her tears. Grandpa opened *Elijah* and began to sing the soprano bits. And after a time she dried her tears, and began to sing, too.

Patient, the old man was. Day after day he sang the oratorio to the mermaid, and, stumblingly at first, then with surprising ease, she sang it after him. Grandpa had never heard it sung so well.

In fact, she would have learnt the soprano part even more quickly, he decided, if Know-all had not, unfortunately, been one of the survivors. But it was quite clear that her fishy mind still found him irresistible. Everywhere he went she followed him with her eyes, and would break off in the middle of a passage just at the sight of him.

Still, she learnt her part. In the seventh heaven, Grandpa was, and at last, his voice trembling with excitement, he called a full rehearsal.

Standing there on his rostrum—the cab of the railway engine

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—he looked proudly at the survivors. He lifted his baton, swept it down for a chorus.

Silence.

Puzzled, he rapped on the engine, held the baton raised, swept it down once more.

Silence.

He looked at the chorus. For the first time he noticed their sullen, pinched faces. Realization dawned.

"Mutiny is it, then?" he asked quietly.

Know-all Jenkins stepped forward. He said truculently, "Men cannot sing when their bellies are empty."

The crowd gave an angry murmur of agreement.

Grandpa Llewellyn put down his baton. Silently he stepped down from the rostrum. Silently he pushed his way through the survivors who, seeing the defeat in his eyes, fell away before him. He walked down to the water's edge, shoulders slumped, and gazed for a long time with unseeing eyes at the ocean.

Then suddenly he appeared to reach a decision. Briskly he climbed into his boat, pushed off, started the engine. The waves began to cream beneath the bows. He swung round in a wide arc and headed northward. Soon he was lost to sight in the dancing waves.

It was two whole days before he returned, and dumped four enormous sacks on the shore. "Porridge," he said briefly.

Know-all Jenkins looked scornful. "Can't live on that," he said. "Brings me out in spots, see."

Grandpa was a quiet man, but he had had a bit too much. "Holding a bagpipes competition they were, while I landed and stole that," he exploded. He shuddered at the memory. "And now you say you can't eat it."

Fortunately, however, the other survivors were less disagreeable than Know-all, and soon they were all so full of porridge that they were singing the *Soldiers' Chorus* from *Faust* as loud as you please. And at last Grandpa, beaming, held up his hand.

"Who wants a full rehearsal tomorrow morning?" he cried happily.

"I do," they all shouted. And Grandma put her old hand on Grandpa's and squeezed it fondly. Victory at last!

But that evening a terrible thing happened. Terrible!

Soon after tea, it was. There was Know-all Jenkins in the sea, showing off his breast stroke, when the mermaid, who was combing her hair and smoothing out a few faults in *Hear our Cry, O Baal*, suddenly slithers off her rock, flips into the sea, and before anyone knows what is happening she has wound a white arm

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round Know-all's neck and is dragging him down, down, down into the green, terrible deeps, never to return, never to return . . .

Peaceful it was without Know-all, of course. But Grandpa Llewellyn wished there could have been some other way. Inconsolable, he was. All night he sat at the water's edge, watching, waiting. At last Grandma stole out and sat with him.

Darkness, and the lapping waves. " Never hear a soprano like that again," cried Grandpa, forlorn.

A rising moon, and the sea like quicksilver.

" Wonder what Know-all is doing," Grandma murmured.

" Showing Davy Jones how to tidy up his locker, I shouldn't wonder," said Grandpa sadly.

Dawn, and the mermaid's rock empty, and no song in the cold morning air. No such singing, ever again.

Never quite the same afterwards, the old man was. Later, when the waters subsided, he had the honour to conduct the Aberdaron Nightingale in *Elijah* at Swansea. But he conducted like one in a dream. Never the same again, poor old man.

But what, you may well ask, caused the inundation?

No one could find out. Polar ice-cap melting sudden, maybe? A vast upheaval on the sea bed? No one can say. Unless, of course, Davy Jones, who ought to know, told Know-all Jenkins.

Or unless Know-all Jenkins told Davy Jones.

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. . . In trim gardens takes his pleasure

JOHN MILTON

As for Love with a capital L: "Once upon a time," wrote Alphonse Allais, "in a garden, a man and a woman were sitting side by side. As the setting sun poured out its golden powder, the man clasped the woman in his arms and whispered, 'I have never known anyone but you. I cannot imagine anyone else.' And the woman, leaning tenderly on his shoulder, replied, 'You're the only man in the world.' . . . For once they were right. It was Adam and Eve."

GONTRAN DE PONCINS, *Father Sets the Pace*

By the Fountain

You will perhaps make love to me this evening,
Dancing among the circular green tables
Or where the clockwork tinkle of the fountain
Sounds in the garden's primly pebbled arbours.

ADRIENNE CECILE RICH, *The Kursaal at Interlaken*

Beauty in the Morning

"But how can you sleep on such a beautiful morning?"

Misako laughed. "It's a beautiful morning for sleep, too."

"But the important thing is that you're being rude to your honoured guest," Takanatsu countered . . . "I forgive you. Brush your teeth and come on out. I have something for you too." Takanatsu's face as he looked up at the window was partly hidden by a branch of plum blossoms.

"That's the new dog?"

"That's the new dog. They're very popular in Shanghai these days."

"Isn't he a beauty, Mother?" Hiroshi spoke for the first time.

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" Uncle Hideo says you ought to go out walking with this sort of dog."

" And what reason does he give? "

" Foreign women use dogs as a sort of ornament," Takanatsu answered. " Go out with him and you'll look more beautiful than ever." . . .

" But he's so thin. I'd look even plumper than I am."

" That would be nice for the dog, wouldn't it? ' She sets me off so beautifully,' he'd be saying."

" I won't forget that remark."

Hiroshi joined in the laughter, whether he understood or not.

JUNICHIRO TANIZAKI, *Some Prefer Nettles*

Cold Spell

Remembering what passed
Under the scent of the plum tree,
I asked the plum tree for tidings
Of that other.
Alas . . . the cold moon of spring . . .

FUJIWARA IETAKA, 1158–1237

Nocturne

But what was sweeter than dancing and the lovely waltzes of those days were the gardens gay with paper lanterns, and the trees as green as lettuces over the fairy lamps; and the smell of the limes and the night stocks hanging on the dark, and the lovely girls in their trailing skirts walking under the old walls, like the ghosts of queens. Then we would go out in the early morning, all as we were, but wrapped up in furs, and take breakfast on the river; so sleepy and lazy that the noise of the water sent us to sleep.

JOYCE CARY, *Herself Surprised*

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Up the Garden Path

They had entered a little thicket; it was dusk; I followed them. Villaça's eyes were sparkling with wine and voluptuousness.

" Let me alone! " she said.

" No one can see us. Die, my angel? What an idea! You know that I should die, too . . . What am I saying? I die every day, I die of passion, of longing . . ."

Dona Eusebia raised her handkerchief to her eyes. The extemporizer was racking his memory for an appropriate quotation and finally found the following one, which, as I learned at a later date, is from one of Judeu's libretti:

" Do not weep, my love, lest the redness of the dawn be reflected in your eyes."

He said this, and drew her toward him. She resisted a little, but only for a moment. Their faces met, and I heard the smack, ever so soft, of a kiss, a most timorous kiss.

" Dr. Villaça just kissed Dona Eusebia! " I shouted, running through the garden.

MACHADO DE ASSIS, *Epitaph of a Small Winner*

Green Lullaby

And then the wind that blows about the garden
Takes up the theme, and gentle is its voice:
" Green is my cradle, child of happiness,
Joy in my blossom, ere thine own be withered . . . ! "
And left and right of him the flowers and grasses
Speak to him from their dreams, " We too are sleeping."
Even the stars above him take on voices,
And wink: " We sleep, although our eyes are open."
The drunken odours of a thousand flowers
Mount to his nostrils in resistless waves:
They break upon his eyes, his lips, his throat.

CHAIM NACHMAN BIALIK, *The Mathmid*

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A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

THE OYSTER CATCHER

As he probed
a curious little problem emerged

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

THE table was the first thing that caught your eye as you came into the room. Its legs were of green-painted angle-iron, bolted to the floor; its top, a block of polished teak. Overhead shone five white fluorescent lights.

On the wide, shadowless, aseptic surface the raincoat looked out of place, like some jolly, seedy old tramp who has strayed into an operating-theatre. A coat is such a personal thing, almost a second skin. As it loses its own shape and takes on the outlines of its wearer, as its pockets become a repository of tobacco flakes and sand and fragments of leaves, and its exterior becomes spotted with more unexpected things than rain, so does it take on an intimate life all of its own.

There was an element of indecency, Petrella thought, in tearing this life from it. The earnest man in rimless glasses and a white laboratory overall had just finished going over the lining with a pocket-sized vacuum cleaner with a thimble-shaped container. Now he was at work on the exterior. He cut a broad strip of adhesive tape and laid it on the outside of the coat, pressing it firmly down. Then he marked the area with a special pencil, and pulled the tape off. There was nothing visible to the naked eye on the under surface of the tape, but he seemed satisfied.

"We'll make a few micro-slides," he said. "They'll tell us anything we want to know. There's no need for you to hang about if you don't want to."

Sergeant Petrella disliked being told, even indirectly, that he was wasting his time. Let the truth be told, he did not care for Scientific Assistant Worsley at all. Worsley had the very slightly patronizing manner of one who has himself been admitted to the inner circles of knowledge and is speaking to unfortunates who

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are still outside the pale—a habit, Petrella had noticed, that was very marked at the outset of a scientific career, but diminished as a man gained more experience and realized how little certainty there was, even under the eye of the microscope.

"All right," he said. "I'll push off and come back in a couple of hours."

"To do the job completely," said Worsley, "will take about six days." He looked complacently at the neat range of Petri dishes round the table, and the samples he had so far extracted. "Perhaps another three to tabulate the results."

"All the same," said Petrella, "I'll look in this evening and see what you have got for me."

"As long as you appreciate," said Worsley, "that the results I give you will be unchecked."

"I'll take a chance on that."

"That, of course, is for you to decide." His voice contained a reproof. Impetuous people, police officers. Unschooled in the discipline of the laboratory. Jumpers to conclusions. People on whom careful, controlled research was usually wasted. Worsley sighed audibly.

Sergeant Petrella said nothing at all. He had long ago found out that it was a waste of time antagonizing people who were in a position to help you.

He consulted his watch, his notebook, and his stomach. He had a call to make in Wandsworth, another in Acton, and a third in South Harrow. Then he would come back to the Forensic Science Laboratory to see what Worsley had got for them. Then he would go back to Highside and report to Superintendent Haxtell. He might have time for lunch between Acton and South Harrow. If not, the prospect of food was remote, for once he reached Highside, there was no saying that Haxtell would not have a lot more visits lined up for him.

All this activity—and, indirectly, the coat lying on Worsley's table—stemmed from a discovery made by a milkman at No. 39 Carhow Mansions. Carhow Mansions is a tall block of flats overlooking the southern edge of Helenwood Common.

Miss Martin, who lived alone at No. 39, was a woman of about thirty. Neither beautiful, nor clever; nor ugly, nor stupid. She was secretary to Dr. Hunter, who had a house and consulting-room in Wimpole Street. She did her work well, and was well paid for it.

The flat, which was tucked away on the top storey and was smaller than the others in the block, was known as a "single," which means that it had about as little accommodation as one person could actually exist in. A living-room that was also a

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dining-room; an annexe that served as a bedroom; one cupboard, called a kitchen, and another called a bathroom. Not that Miss Martin had ever been heard to complain. She had no time to waste on housework and ate most of her meals out. Her interests were Shakespeare and tennis.

Which brings us to the milkman, who, finding Friday's milk bottle still unused outside the door of Flat 39 on Saturday, mentioned the matter to the caretaker.

The caretaker was not immediately worried. Tenants often went away without telling him, although Miss Martin was usually punctilious about such matters. Later in the morning his rounds took him up to No. 39, and he looked at the two milk bottles and found the sight faintly disturbing. Fortunately, he had his pass-key with him.

Which brought Superintendent Haxtell onto the scene in a fast car. And Chief Superintendent Barstow, from District Head-quarters. And photographic and fingerprint detachments, and a well-known pathologist, and a crowd on the pavement, and a uniformed policeman to control them. And eventually, since Carhow Mansions was in his manor, Sergeant Petrella.

Junior detective sergeants do not conduct investigations into murders, but they are allowed to help, in much the same way as a junior officer helps to run a war. They are allowed to do the work, while their superiors do the thinking. In this case, there was a lot of work to do.

"I don't like it," said Barstow, in the explosive rumble that was his normal conversational voice. "Here's this girl, as ordinary as apples-and-custard. No one's got a word to say against her. Life's an open book. Then someone comes in and hits her on the head, not once, but five or six times."

"Any one of the blows might have caused death," agreed the pathologist. "She's been dead more than twenty-four hours. Probably killed on Friday morning. And I think there's no doubt that that was the weapon." He indicated a heavy long-handled screwdriver.

"It could have belonged to her," said Haxtell. "Funny thing to find in a flat, though. More like a piece of workshop equipment."

"All right," said Barstow. "Suppose the murderer brought it with him. Ideal for the job. You could force a front door with a thing like that. Then, if the owner comes out, it's just as handy as a weapon. But it's still—" he boggled over the word and its implications—"it's still mad."

And the further they looked, and the wider they spread their net, the madder it did seem.

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Certain facts came to light at once. Haxtell was talking to Doctor Hunter, of Wimpole Street, within the hour. The doctor explained that Miss Martin had not come to work on Friday because he himself had ordered her to stay in bed.

"I think she'd been over-using her eyes," said the doctor. "That gave her a headache, and the headache in turn affected her stomach. It was a form of migraine. What she needed was forty-eight hours on her back, with the blinds down. I told her to take Friday off, and come back on Monday if she felt well enough. She's been with me for nearly ten years now. An excellent secretary, and such a nice girl."

He spoke with so much warmth that Haxtell, who was a cynic, made a mental note of a possible line of inquiry. Nothing came of it. The doctor, it transpired, was very happily married.

"That part of it fits all right," said Haxtell to Chief Superintendent Barstow. "She was in bed when the intruder arrived. He hit her as she was coming out of her bedroom."

"Then you think he was a housebreaker?"

"I'd imagined so, yes," said Haxtell. "The screwdriver looks like the sort of thing a housebreaker would carry. You could force an ordinary mortise lock right off with it. He didn't have to use it in this instance, because she'd got a simple catch-lock that a child of five could open. I don't doubt he slipped it with a piece of talc."

"Why did he choose her flat?"

"Because it was an isolated one, on the top floor. Or because he knew her habits. Just bad luck that she should have been there at all."

"Bad luck for her," agreed Barstow sourly. "Well, we've got the machine working. We may turn something up."

Haxtell was an experienced police officer. He knew that investigating a murder was like dropping a stone into a pool of water. He started two inquiries at once. Everybody within a hundred yards of the flat was asked what they had been doing and whether they had noticed anything. And everyone remotely connected with Miss Martin, by ties of blood, friendship, or business, was sought out and questioned.

It is a system that involves an enormous amount of work for a large number of people, and has got only one thing in its favour. It is nearly always successful in the end.

To Sergeant Petrella fell the task of questioning all the other tenants in the block. This involved seven visits. In each case at least one person, it appeared, had been at home all Friday morning. And no one had heard anything, which was disappointing.

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Had anything unusual happened on Friday morning? The first six people to whom this inquiry was addressed scratched their heads and said that they didn't think anything had. The seventh mentioned the gentleman who had left census papers.

Now Petrella was by then both hot and tired. He was, according to which way you looked at it, either very late for his lunch or rather early for his tea. He was on the point of dismissing the man with the census papers when the instinct that guides all good policeman drove him to persevere with one further inquiry. Had he not, the Martin case would probably have remained unsolved.

As he probed, a curious little story emerged. The man had not actually left any papers behind him. He had been making preliminary inquiries as to the number of people on the premises so that arrangements for the census could be put in hand. The papers would be issued later.

Petrella trudged down three flights of stairs—it is only in grave emergency that a policeman is allowed to use a private telephone—and rang up the Municipal Returning Officer from a call box.

After that he revisited the first six flats. The occupants unanimously agreed that a " man from the Council " had called on them that Friday morning. They had not mentioned it because Petrella had asked if anything " unusual " had happened. There was nothing in the least unusual in men from the Council snooping round.

Petrella asked for a description and collated, from his six informants, the following items. The man in question was young, youngish, sort of middle-aged—this was from the teen-aged daughter in No. 37. He was bareheaded and had tousled hair. He was wearing a hat. He had a shifty look—No. 34; a nice smile—teen-aged daughter; couldn't say, didn't really look at him—the remainder. He was about six foot—five foot nine—five foot six—didn't notice. He had an ordinary sort of voice. He was wearing an Old Harrovian tie—gentleman in ground-floor flat No. 34. He seemed to walk with rather a stiff sort of leg, almost a limp—four out of six informants.

Petrella hurried back to Highside Police Station where he found Haxtell and Barstow in conference.

" There doesn't seem to be much doubt," he reported, " that it was a sneak thief. Posing as a Council employee. I've checked with them and they are certain that he couldn't have been genuine. His plan would be to knock once or twice. If he got no answer he'd either slip the lock or force it. He drew a blank at the other seven. Someone answered the door in each of them. When he got to No. 39, I expect Miss Martin didn't hear him. The migraine must have made her pretty blind and deaf."

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"That's right," said Barstow. "And then she came out and caught him at it, and he hit her."

"The descriptions aren't a lot of good," said Haxtell, "but we'll get all the pictures from the C.R.O. of people known to go in for this sort of lark. They may sort someone out for us."

"Don't forget the most important item," said Barstow. "The limp."

Petrella said, "It did occur to me to wonder whether we ought to place much reliance on the limp, sir."

He received a glare that would have daunted a less self-confident man.

"He would have to have somewhere to hide that big screwdriver. It was almost two foot long. The natural place would be a pocket inside his trouser leg. That might account for the appearance of a stiff leg."

Haxtell avoided Barstow's eye. "It's an idea," he said. "Now just get along and start checking on this list of Miss Martin's known relations."

"There was one other thing—"

"Do you know," observed Chief Superintendent Barstow unkindly, "why God gave young policemen two feet but only one head?"

Petrella accepted the hint and departed.

Nevertheless, the idea persisted; and later that day, when he was alone with Superintendent Haxtell, he voiced it to him.

"Do you remember," he said, "about six months ago, I think it was, we had an outbreak of this sort of thing in the Cholderton Road, Park Branch area? A man cleared out three or four blocks of flats, and we never caught him. He was posing as a pools salesman then."

"The man who left his coat behind."

"That's right," said Petrella. "With Colonel Wing."

Colonel Wing was nearly ninety and rather deaf, but still spry. He had fought in the Afghan campaign, and one Zulu war, and the walls of his top-floor living-room in Cholderton Mansions were adorned with a fine selection of assegais, yataghans, and knopkieries. Six months before this story opens he had had an experience that might have unnerved a less seasoned warrior.

Pottering out of his bedroom one fine morning at about eleven o'clock—he was not an early riser—he had observed a man kneeling in front of his sideboard and quietly sorting out the silver. It was difficult to say who had been more taken aback. The man had jumped up, and run from the room. Colonel Wing had regretfully dismissed the idea of trying to spear him with an assegai

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from the balcony as he left the front door of the flats, and had rung up the police. They had made one curious discovery.

Hanging in the hall was a strange raincoat.

" Never seen it before in my life," said Colonel Wing. " D'you mean to say the damn feller had the cheek to hang his coat up before starting work? Wonder he didn't help himself to a whisky-and-soda while he was about it."

Haxtell said that he had known housebreakers to do just that. He talked to the Colonel at length about the habits of criminals; and removed the coat for examination. Since the crime was only an attempted robbery, it was not thought worth while wasting too much time on it. A superficial examination produced no results in the way of name tabs or tailors' marks, the coat was carefully placed in a cellophane bag and stored.

" I'd better have a word with him," said Petrella.

He found the Colonel engaged in writing a letter to the *United Services' Journal* on the comparative fighting qualities of Zulus and Russians. He listened to the descriptions of the intruder, and said that, as far as one could tell, they sounded like the same man. His intruder had been on the young side of middle age, of medium height, and strongly built.

" There's one thing," said the Colonel. " I saw him in a good light, and I may be deaf, but I've got excellent eyesight. There's a tiny spot on his left eye. A little red spot, like a fire opal. You couldn't mistake it. If you catch him, I'll identify him for you fast enough."

" The trouble is," said Petrella, " that it looks as if he's never been through our hands. Almost the only real lead we've got is that coat he left behind him at your place. We're going over it again now, much more thoroughly."

Thus had the coat grown in importance. It had improved its status. It had become a possible exhibit in a murder case.

" Give it everything," said Haxtell to the scientists. And the scientists prepared to oblige.

That evening, after a weary afternoon spent interrogating Miss Martin's father's relatives in Acton and South Harrow, Petrella found himself back on the Embankment. The Forensic Science Laboratory observes civilized hours and Mr. Worsley was on the point of removing his long white overall and replacing it with a rather deplorable green tweed coat with matching leather patches on the elbows.

" I've finished my preliminary work on the right-hand pocket," he said. " We have isolated arrowroot starch, pipe tobacco, and a quantity of common silver sand."

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" Splendid," said Petrella. " Splendid. All I have got to do now is to find a housewife who smokes a pipe and has recently been to the seaside and we shall be home and dry."

" What use you make of the data we provide must be entirely a matter for you," said Mr. Worsley coldly. He was already late for a meeting of the South Wimbledon Medico-Legal Society, to whom he had promised a paper entitled, *The Part of the Laboratory in Modern Crime Detection.*

Petrella went back to Highside.

There he found a note from Superintendent Haxtell that ran: " A friend of Miss Martin has suggested that some or other of these were, or might have been, boy-friends of the deceased. I am seeing ones marked with cross. Would you tackle the others? " There followed a list of names and addresses ranging from Welwyn Garden City to Morden.

He looked at his watch. It was half past seven. With any luck he could knock off a few of them before midnight.

In the ensuing days the ripples spread wider and wider, diminishing in size and importance as they became more distant from the centre of the disturbance.

Petrella worked his way from near relatives and close friends, who said, " How terrible! Who ever would have thought of anything like that happening to Marjorie! " through more distant connections who said, " Miss Martin? Yes, I know her. I haven't seen her for a long time," right out to the circumference where there were people who simply looked bewildered and said, " Miss Martin—I'm sorry, I don't think I remember anyone of that name," and on being reminded that they had danced with her at a tennis-club dance two years before said, " If you say so, I expect it's right, but I'm dashed if I can remember what she looked like."

It was in the course of the third day that Petrella called at a nice little house in Herne Hill. The name was Taylor. Mr. Taylor was not at home, but the door was opened by his wife, a cheerful redhead, who banished her two children to the kitchen when she understood what Petrella was after.

Her reactions were the standard ones. Apprehension, followed, as soon as she understood that what Petrella wanted was nothing to do with her, by a cheerful communicativeness. Miss Martin was, she believed, her husband's cousin. That is to say not his cousin, but his second cousin, or something like that. Her husband's father's married sister's husband's niece. So far as she knew they had only met her once, and that was quite by chance, six months before, at the funeral of Miss Martin's mother who was, of course, sister to her husband's uncle by marriage.

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Petrella disentangled this complicated relationship without difficulty. He was already a considerable expert on the Martin family tree. Unfortunately, Mrs. Taylor could tell him nothing. Her acquaintance with Miss Martin was confined to this single occasion and she had not set eyes on her since. Her husband, who was a commercial traveller for Joblox, the London paint firm, was unlikely to be back until very late. He was on a tour in the Midlands, and it depended on the traffic, when he got home. Petrella said he quite understood. The interview remained in his memory chiefly because it was on his way back from it that he picked up his copy of the laboratory report on the coat.

The scientists had done themselves proud. No inch of its surface, interior or exterior, had escaped their microscopic gaze. Petrella cast his eye desperately over the eight closely-typed foolscap pages. Stains on the exterior had been isolated and chemically tested and proved beyond reasonable doubt to be in two cases ink, in one case rabbit blood, and in one case varnish. A quantity of sisal-hemp fluff had been recovered from the seam of the left-hand cuff and some marmalade from the right-hand one.

A sliver of soft wood, originally identified on the Chatterton Key Card as ordinary pinus sylvestris was now believed to be chamaecyparis lawsoniana. In the right-hand pocket had been discovered a number of fragments of oyster shell, and a stain of oil shown by quantitative analysis to be a thick oil of a sort much used in marine engineering.

Petrella read the report in the underground between Charing Cross and Highside. When he reached the Police Station he found Haxtell in the C.I.D. room. He had in front of him the reports of all visits so far made. There were two hundred and thirty of them. Petrella added the five he had completed that afternoon, and was about to retire when he remembered the laboratory report, and cautiously added that too to the pile. He was conscious of thunder in the air.

" Don't bother," said Haxtell. " I've had a copy." His eyes were red-rimmed from lack of proper sleep. " So has the Chief Superintendent. He's just been here. He wants us to take some action on it."

" Action, sir? "

" He suggests," said Haxtell, in ominously quiet tones, " that we re-examine all persons interviewed so far—" his hand flickered for a moment over the pile of paper on the table—" to ascertain whether they have ever been interested in the oyster-fishing industry. He feels that the coincidence of oyster shell and marine oil must have some significance."

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"I see, sir," said Petrella. "When do we start?"

Haxtell stopped himself within an ace of saying something that would have been both indiscreet and insubordinate. Then, to his eternal credit, he laughed instead. "We are both," he said, "going to get one good night's rest first. We'll start tomorrow morning."

"I wonder if I could borrow the reports until then," said Petrella, wondering at himself as he did so.

"Do what you like with them," said Haxtell. "I've got three days' routine work to catch up with."

Petrella took them back with him to Mrs. Catt's where that worthy widow had prepared a high tea for him, his first leisured meal for three days. Sustained by a mountainous dish of sausages and eggs and refreshed by his third cup of strong tea, he started on the task of proving to himself the theory that had come to him.

Each paper was skimmed, and put on one side. Every now and then he would stop, extract one, and add it to a much smaller pile beside his plate. At the end of an hour, Petrella looked at the results of his work with satisfaction. In the small pile were six papers, six summaries of interviews with friends or relations of the murdered girl. If his idea was right, he had thus, at a stroke, reduced the possibles from two hundred and thirty-five to six. And of those six possibles, only one, he knew in his heart of hearts, was a probable.

There came back into his mind the visit that he had made that afternoon. There it was, in that place and no other, that the answer lay. There he had glimpsed, without realizing it, the end of the scarlet thread that led to the heart of this untidy, rambling labyrinth. He thought of a nice redheaded girl and two redheaded children, and unexpectedly he found himself shivering.

It was dusk before he got back to Herne Hill. The lights were on in the nice little house, upstairs and downstairs, and a muddy car stood in the gravel run-in in front of the garage. Sounds suggested that the redheaded children were being put to bed by both their parents and were enjoying it.

One hour went by, and then a second. Petrella had found an empty house opposite, and he was squatting in the garden, his back propped against a tree. The night was warm and he was quite comfortable, and his head was nodding on his chest when the front door of the house opposite opened, and Mr. Taylor appeared.

He stood for a moment, outlined against the light from the hall, saying something to his wife. He was too far off for Petrella to make out the words. Then he came down the path. He

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ignored the car, and made for the front gate, for which Petrella was thankful. He had made certain arrangements to cope with the contingency that Mr. Taylor might use his car, but it was much easier if he remained on foot.

A short walk took them both, pursuer and pursued, to the door of the King of France public house. Mr. Taylor went into the saloon. Petrella himself chose the private bar. Like most private bars it had nothing to recommend it save its privacy, being narrow, bare, and quite empty. But it had the advantage of looking straight across the serving-counter into the saloon.

Petrella let his man order first. He was evidently a well-known character in the King of France. He called the landlord Sam, and the landlord called him Mr. Taylor.

Petrella drank his own beer slowly. Ten minutes later the moment for which he had been waiting arrived. Mr. Taylor picked up a couple of glasses and strolled across with them to the counter. Petrella also rose casually to his feet. For a moment they faced each other, a bare two paces apart, under the bright bar lights.

Petrella saw in front of him a man of early middle age, with a nondescript face and neutral-coloured tousled hair, perhaps five foot nine in height, and wearing some sort of old-school tie.

As if aware that he was being looked at, Mr. Taylor raised his head; and Petrella observed, in the left eye, a tiny red spot. It was, as the Colonel had said, exactly the colour of a fire opal.

" We showed his photograph to everyone in the block," said Haxtell with satisfaction, " and they all of them picked it out straight away, out of a set of six. Also the Colonel."

" Good enough," said Chief Superintendent Barstow. " Any background? "

" We made a very cautious inquiry at Joblox. Taylor certainly works for them. But he's what they call an outside commission man. He sells in his spare time, and gets a percentage on sales. Last year he made just under a hundred pounds."

" Which wouldn't keep him in his present style."

" Definitely not. And of course a job like that would be very useful cover for a criminal sideline. He would be out when and where he liked, and no questions asked by his family."

Barstow considered the matter slowly. The decision was his.

" Pull him in," he said. " Charge him with the job at Colonel Wing's. The rest will sort itself out quick enough when we search his house. Take a search-warrant with you. By the way, I never asked how you got onto him. Has he some connection with the oyster trade? "

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Petrella said, cautiously, "Well . . . no, sir. As a matter of fact, he hadn't. But the report was very useful corroborative evidence."

"Clever chaps, these scientists," said Barstow.

"Come clean," said Haxtell, when the Chief Superintendent had departed. "It was nothing to do with that coat, was it?"

"Nothing at all," said Petrella. "What occurred to me was that it was a very curious murder. Presuming it was the same man both times. Take Colonel Wing—he's full of beans, but when all's said and done, he's a frail old man, over ninety. He saw the intruder in a clear light, and the man simply turned tail and bolted. Then he bumps into Miss Martin, who's a girl, but a muscular young tennis player, but he *kills* her, coldly and deliberately."

"From which you deduced that Miss Martin knew him, and he was prepared to kill to preserve the secret of his identity. Particularly as he had never been in the hands of the police."

"There was a bit more to it than that," said Petrella. "It had to be someone who knew Miss Martin, but so casually that he would have no idea where she lived. Mightn't even remember her name. If he'd had any idea that it was the flat of someone who knew him he wouldn't have touched it with a barge pole. What I was looking for was someone who was distantly connected with Miss Martin, but happened to have renewed his acquaintance with her recently. He had to be a very distant connection, you see. But they had to know each other by sight. There were half a dozen who could have filled the bill. I had this one in my mind because I'd interviewed Mrs. Taylor only that afternoon. Of course, I'd have tried all the others afterwards. Only it wasn't necessary."

There was neither pleasure nor satisfaction in his voice. He was seeing nothing but a nice redheaded girl and two redheaded children.

It was perhaps six months later that Petrella ran across Colonel Wing again. The Taylor case was now only an uncomfortable memory, for Mr. Taylor had taken his own life in his cell, and the redheaded girl was now a widow. Petrella was on his way home, and he might not have noticed him, but the Colonel came right across the road to greet him, narrowly missing death at the hands of a motor cyclist of whose approach he had been blissfully unaware. "Good evening, Sergeant," the old man said. "How are you keeping?"

"Very well, thank you, Colonel," said Petrella. "And how are you?"

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" I'm not getting any younger," said the Colonel. Petrella suddenly perceived to his surprise that the old man was covered with embarrassment. He waited patiently for him to speak.

" I wonder—" said the old man at last, " it's an awkward thing to have to ask, but could you get that coat back—you remember? "

" Get it *back*? " said Petrella. " I don't know. I suppose so."

" If it was mine, I wouldn't bother. But it isn't. I find it's my cousin Tom's. I'd forgotten all about it, until he reminded me."

Petrella stared at him.

" Do you mean to say—"

" Tom stayed the night with me—he does that sometimes, between trips. Just drops in. Of course, when he reminded me, I remembered—"

" Between trips . . ." said Petrella weakly. " He isn't by any chance an oyster fisherman? "

It was the Colonel's turn to stare. " Certainly not," he said. " He's one of the best-known breeders of budgerigars in the country."

" Budgerigars? "

" Very well-known for them. I believe I'm right in saying he introduced the foreign system of burnishing their feathers with oil. It's funny you should mention oysters, though. That's a thing he's very keen on. Powdered oyster shell in the feed. It improves their high notes."

Petrella removed his hat in a figurative but belated salute to the Forensic Science Laboratory.

" Certainly you shall have your coat back," he said. " It'll need a thorough clean and a little stitching, but I am delighted to think that it is going to be of use to someone at last."

★ ★ ★

CON BRIO FROM RIO

The story was current during one of the sessions of the General Assembly of one of the most loquacious of the Latin American delegates who left the notes of his speech on the table in the Committee room, where it was picked up with other papers by accident by a colleague. The latter discovered it while reading his own documents in his hotel that night, and was fascinated to find that it was almost orchestrated, and was indeed marked *crescendo* at the most emphatic passages and *diminuendo* at others. But the delegate's eye was caught by a large blue cross on page 28. Looking more closely he saw that it was marked, " Weak point! *Shout!* "

BERNARD MOORE, *The Second Lesson*

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Licorice Fields

In the licorice fields at Pontefract
My love and I did meet
And many a burdened licorice bush
Was blooming round our feet;
Red hair she had and golden skin,
Her sulky lips were shaped for sin,
Her sturdy legs were flannel-slack'd.
The strongest legs in Pontefract.

The light and dangling licorice flowers
Gave off the sweetest smells;
From various black Victorian towers
The Sunday evening bells
Came pealing over dales and hills
And tanneries and silent mills
And lowly streets where country stops
And little shuttered corner shops.

She cast her blazing eyes on me
And plucked a licorice leaf;
I was her captive slave and she
My red-haired robber chief.
Oh love! for love I could not speak,
It left me winded, wilting, weak
And held in brown arms strong and bare
And wound with flaming ropes of hair.

JOHN BETJEMAN

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THE MASK AND THE MAIDEN

How could a respectable girl have done such a thing?

BY JOHN COLLIER

I AM glad you have asked these questions, gentlemen. Each of them hinges on motive, and this, if I may say so, is the attitude of maturity.

I feared at first you wanted the coarse and comic story that has already been told over and over again, with people laughing till the tears rolled down their cheeks, throughout the length and breadth of Viridian Springs, and probably as far afield as Tucson and Phoenix by this time. And, speaking of tears, you will be interested to know that not only did Elinor Baker cry herself to sleep every night after her incredible blunder, but she had done so, almost as bitterly and almost as often, for months *before* it.

Elinor had reached the age of thirty without ever having been loved. Certain joys are the absolute birthright of every girl, and they should be hers when she is of an age and inclination for them, or else a cruel and shameful deprivation has been inflicted upon her, and, as the poet says, " Else a great Prince in prison lies." The joys in question include but are not limited to kisses, embraces, whisperings, quarrels, forgiveness, bearlike hugs, the intimate and permissible use of improper expressions, wild outcries in the dark, maternity, the security of the heart, smacks on the behind, and being pulled back by a strong arm when stepping in front of a bus.

No greater prince than Elinor Baker's immense capacity to give and receive such joys; no crueller prison than the accident of the flesh that denied them to her! Elinor's face was extremely unattractive to men.

However, she was not a freak. Her face, though uninviting to kiss, was quite agreeable to contemplate. It radiated the honest warmth and friendliness of her nature. Her other features were by no means hideous or grotesque, but collectively they gave an impression of sexlessness which was nonetheless forbidding for being entirely false.

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As deputy librarian at Viridian Springs she had free access to a wide range of books on sex and psychology, and she studied them in the hope that each next page would reveal some tremendous secret to her. They told her very little that she did not know already, although in some instances she had not been aware that she knew it.

They did not tell her how to behave on the few occasions she went out with a young man; nor could she have profited by it had they done so.

She had no clear awareness of the element in her shyness that made it repellent instead of seductive, or of the element in her rare and quaking boldnesses that gave them all the blood-chilling ugliness of unconcealed desperation. She was not in the least a prude.

As a matter of fact her body was extremely beautiful; so beautiful, indeed, that if I refrain from the use of words like goddess or Greek statue, it is mainly because these words suggest a certain remoteness in the one case, and something cold and lifeless in the other. Elinor's body was extremely near and warm and alive.

It was nearest of all, naturally, to Elinor herself, who was destined to be consumed by its warmth. She would sometimes find herself standing in front of the mirror, her poor face, uglier than ever with its look of earnestness and wretchedness and apprehension, looking back at her from above that Venus body, that body which she had let down by having so unfortunate a face.

You must remember that the nearest sea coasts are those of Southern California, where the hotels are not of the cheapest, and where what begins with a two-piece bathing-suit, and may end with less, must pass through an intermediate stage in which one or two attractive dresses are indispensable. Elinor had worked out the minimum sum on which she could finance a holiday on the coast, and by the third week of last May she had attained this objective, and it was her intention to spend her three-week summer holiday at Laguna Beach. She had considered Malibu and Santa Monica, but feared competition from film aspirants, whereas Laguna has the reputation of attracting people of artistic leanings. One must admire the vigilance and sapience of the sexual instinct, which, even in this confused and unworldly girl, had somehow, at some time, on heaven knows what passing contact, made a certain observation of the appearance of the wives of artists, and now brought it forth to guide her in her choice.

I think you spoke also of swimming-pools, which certainly would have been cheaper, but when it comes to swimming-pools,

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I can only invite you to consider the peculiar social structure of Viridian Springs.

In New England it would be the most ordinary town imaginable, but where else in the south-western deserts can you find a township of 5,000 or so, in which at least twenty families of considerable wealth have remained and ramified to the second and third generation? As a result, we now have, with these twenty families as a nucleus, a well-established and definitely separated upper class.

The springs themselves, remember, do not rise here in our thriving business district, but around the hill half a mile to the west, in the section now called Vallombrosa. There are the springs; there are the trees and the enormous gardens; there are the old houses of the original mine-owners and citrus-growers. There, too, is Mrs. Dunlop's Frank Lloyd Wright house, and the Neutra and the Schindler and the Gregory Ain of the younger generation.

There is our claim to consider ourselves the Santa Barbara of South Arizona, and there, gentlemen, are the swimming-pools, all of them, or all but one.

Elinor, though she was on Christian-name terms with many of her contemporaries in this privileged district, especially those whose parents had democratically sent them for a year or two to the school here, was not one of them, and was not asked to swim. The gulf in her case was not immensely wide; had she been outstandingly pretty, or played a first-class game of tennis, someone or other would have invited her sooner or later; as it was, she remained outside.

There is only one other place where there is a swimming-pool, and that is the Country Club.

Elinor, like many others, frequently looked and longed for the Country Club. It is sad that the only people invited to join are those who have, or could afford to have, swimming-pools of their own. We are here in an arid and a burning land; I sometimes wonder why the entire middle class of Viridian Springs does not issue forth on hands and knees and crawl up towards the Country Club like desert wanderers in thirsty pursuit of a mirage.

The happenings began in the third week of May this year, when Elinor suffered a shattering experience. Elinor, unoccupied at her desk one morning, fell into one of those reveries to which all of us here are subject when the wind, laden with dust and dreams and uneasiness, blows up from Mexico. She was recalled to her senses by the swing of the library door, and almost

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bereft of them when she saw, doodled by her fingertip on the dusty margin of her desk, the word she sometimes cried out with such shameful intensity in the hours that she dared not remember.

Really, Elinor! said old Mrs. Dunlop at that moment. Don't you hear me? What ever's the matter? My dear girl, you look as if you'd seen a ghost.

Elinor covered the horrible scribble with her hand. Oh, I don't know, Mrs. Dunlop; I'm not feeling too good, I suppose.

Of course not. You work too hard. The library stays open too late.

But, Mrs. Dunlop, I get off every other evening at six. I think maybe the heat is too much for me.

Now, Elinor, you know as well as I do we have the best and healthiest climate of anywhere. A little heat sometimes, but no humidity. A girl like you should make use of our advantages. You should swim, you should play tennis. Exercise and fun! Barbecues and things! Dances too! I'm an old crock now, but when I was a girl I never missed a dance. Some said I was fast. I told them to go to a certain place I won't mention.

Elinor, covering the dreadful word with her hand, replied that these pleasures were not easily come by in Viridian Springs.

But, my dear, dear girl, you are talking—well, not quite as sensibly as you usually do. What about the Country Club?

You know, Elinor, Mrs. Dunlop went on, we have everything at the Country Club, tennis and dancing and swimming—only, the pool is under repair because of a leak. And where else in the town will you find a Drama Group and Sunday Painters and a gardening club and flower-arrangement classes and talks and musical things—only, I've no ear—and everything as modern and up-to-date as you can possibly imagine? We are not in the least "small town," you know; we always pride ourselves on keeping abreast of the times. And, you know, we've never had to raise our entrance fee; it's still only $500.

Now Elinor was very fond of Mrs. Dunlop, as a cat may be fond of a queen, and Mrs. Dunlop was fond of Elinor, as a queen may be fond of a cat. Queens, of course, have many distractions, but when they suddenly find time for their pent-up fondnesses they are in a position to express them. Seeing Elinor shake her head with a rather shattered smile, Mrs. Dunlop bent over and lowered her voice.

And, my dear, if that's a difficulty, just leave it to me. I have my own secret ways of getting people in without their paying at all.

I expect you have. I think I can guess what they are. It's so generous, and I do appreciate it, Mrs. Dunlop, more than I can

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say. But it isn't the money. I can't join unless they ask me, and they haven't, and they never will.

Elinor Baker, you're plumb crazy. I'm asking you myself at this very moment, and so is Mr. McBride. Mr. McBride, come over here and ask Elinor to join the Country Club.

Why yes, Mrs. Dunlop. Miss Baker, you must join at once. Mrs. Dunlop insists on it; she is very domineering, and we all have to do what she says.

Note the alibi, carefully inserted for quotation in the event of reproaches on the part of other members, who might, he thought, consider Elinor socially unacceptable.

Make her join, Mr. McBride. She's just about my favourite girl in all Viridian Springs. If an old woman can't persuade her, then a young man must.

I wish you would, he said.

Simple words, but accompanied by a smile. A smile has the advantage of not being quotable. This was the McBride smile at its most winning, and it won.

Elinor's hand still covered the dreadful word, obliterated by this time, if such a word can ever be obliterated, which of course it both can and cannot be, but under the extraordinary warmth and friendliness—I believe "sincerity" is the term used in the trade—of Mr. McBride's smiling eyes, she felt its ugliness quicken with something like beauty.

Why yes, Mrs. Dunlop, I'd love to.

So, with a word and a vote and the payment of her $500, Elinor became a member of the Country Club. If you think she encountered snubs and snobbery, you are as much mistaken as was Mr. McBride on this point. Clubs and aristocracies, when well established and secure, have this in common with the swimming-pools we have been speaking of: once you are in, you are in.

And, oh, the kindness of Mr. Henry McBride! He, when he saw Elinor so well received, forgot all his doubts about sponsoring her, and perhaps a little exaggerating the depth and constancy of Mrs. Dunlop's interest in "just about her favourite girl," made it his business—I use the word with intention—to be quite tenderly attentive, even when the good old lady was not, as rarely she was except when artistic activities were in progress, present at the Club. I believe, though I have no direct evidence in support of this particular, that he thought Elinor might report his kindness to her patroness, and for this reason he laid it on thick and heavy.

I think I told you, sir, that lust is only love deprived of an object. The immense love of which Elinor was capable now found its object in Mr. Henry McBride. At once her body

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abdicated its tyranny and enrolled itself in the service of this glorious emotion, consenting henceforth to ask no pleasure except in the bestowal of pleasure upon the beloved.

Moreover, this newly tamed body, this eager convert, this raw recruit, disdainful of caution, impatient of niceties, brought all its abounding health and energy and enthusiasm to the cause, and demanded only to unfurl its beauty like a flag, to press forward, to overthrow all barriers, and to enthrone in triumph that which it so devoutly believed to be *right*.

There is nothing he can ever see in me, but it's enough just to be around and to love him. These were brave words, and like many of their kind they were followed by a sigh.

Her body, lifting its magnificent breasts on that same sigh, cried out that he had never really seen her at all. It is true the swimming-pool remained out of commission during the first few weeks of Elinor's membership, owing to an obdurate leak caused by a continuing shift of the subsoil. Elinor scarcely regretted the pool; she was afloat in a diviner element, uplifted, cleansed, braced, and caressed by the bubbling waters of happiness.

Clubs have been compared to swimming-pools, and happiness may be likened to both. An important feature all three have in common is the possession of a deep end and a shallow end.

In the deep end you may drown; if you dive into the shallow end you may break your neck. The deep end of Elinor's happiness was her love for Mr. McBride; the shallow end of the Viridian Springs Country Club is, I think, the modernity of its cultural activities, so extraordinary for a small Western town, and its atmosphere of sophisticated freedom. You would really think you were in New York. However, you are not.

One evening Elinor was sitting with a few others on the terrace, and happily lapping up one of our justly celebrated Old-Fashioneds, which she considered to be the very best Old-Fashioned she had ever drunk in her life, and which, since it contained whisky twice as good as the ordinary, and twice as much of it, probably deserved the distinction.

The talk was all of the forthcoming production of the *Lysistrata* on the part of the Drama Group. It was to be staged by Fleming Parrot, who is not only wonderful with grouping and sets, but who is one half of that firm of interior decorators which has had such an effect on the taste of our younger generation.

Mr. Parrot had decreed that the play was to be presented boldly, in modern dress, and yet classically, in masks. The ladies were to wear tennis dresses, as combining the classical and the modern, and with this costume and the mask in mind, and feeling she would read her lines with more understanding than some

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others, he had given Elinor quite an effective little part, and thus so replenished her already brimming cup that happiness was quite visibly slopping all round her. People nearby found themselves agreeably splashed by it, as they sat discussing the cast with Fleming Parrot.

Have you asked the S.N.'s yet?

Of course. Naturally. We'd be nowhere without the S.N.'s.

This was new to Elinor. What does that mean? Who are they, the S.N.'s?

The S.N.'s? Don't say you don't know! Rachel Bickling and Maureen Biedelmeyer, of course.

But what does it mean? Why do you call them that?

Well, there they are, over there. You go and ask them.

Elinor never minded having her leg pulled a little, so she at once downed the remains of her Old-Fashioned and walked over to where Rachel Bickling and Maureen Biedelmeyer were sharing a table. Mrs. Bickling is small, dark, with an attractive monkey-face and huge, almost black eyes like those in a Roman portrait. She is a product of Park Avenue, and perhaps the most sophisticated person in all the Club. Maureen is the least so; she is so beautiful and blonde and dumb that strangers think she must be from Hollywood.

They told me to ask you why you are called the S.N.'s.

My dear, how nice of you not to know! Shall we tell her, Maureen? I think we'd better or it'll look as if we're ashamed. S is for Seen, dear, and N for Naked. Which we were, and we shall never forget it, because they won't ever let us. We told only our very best friends, and they told theirs. We thought we were theirs, but it turned out other people were. Anyway it was only our future husbands who saw us, so we got made honest women of. Shall I tell you how it was? Or let Maureen tell you how it was with me, and I'll tell you how it was with her. It may be more lush that way. Go on, Maureen, don't spare my blushes.

Well, she was in this hotel in New York and Peer Bickling was there in the very next suite and they got acquainted, and you know how Peer is, if you ask him gin or vodka he'll be half an hour making up his mind. You see there was some model he was going out with and he just loved talking to Rachel but he liked going out with this model and he couldn't make up his mind. And he was staying in Room 9 and she was staying in Room 6. And somehow one of the screws came out of the 6, I mean the metal one on the door, so it slipped round and made a 9. Because if you turn a 6 upside-down it makes a 9.

So Rachel was getting dressed for the evening and sort of wandering about looking for a cigarette in the living-room, and

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in walks Peer Bickling and she hadn't got a stitch on and then he made up his mind right away. Didn't he, Rachel?

He certainly did. Now I'll tell Maureen's, Elinor. It's much more romantic. You know where Maureen's family used to live, in that little old wooden house where the road from Tucson comes down to the Ditch and makes the bad turn; where there's that tremendous great rock beside the road?

Well, that was the summer Jerry Biedelmeyer bought himself a radio station in Tucson, and it was sort of a new toy, so he used to drive in every evening and come back about one o'clock in the morning. So one day he was driving in and he had a puncture just as he was taking the curve by the rock, and Maureen's old man went out to help him change the wheel and Maureen went along too to hold the nuts and bolts and things, and she and Jerry got talking, and the simple country girl lost her heart to the dark, handsome stranger in the great big new sports car. Isn't that romantic? And he looked as if he liked her all right, but all of a sudden the wheel was fixed and Jerry got in and off he went to his radio station.

After that Maureen used to see him streak by in the evening, and he'd wave his hand, and that was that. And she'd sometimes sit at the window after midnight and watch for that big cream-coloured car to slow up at the bend and then speed off into the night. Or else she'd be lying in bed and she'd see the lights of it on the ceiling. And the worst of it was that Cinderella thought if she could only have had a little more talk with Prince Charming —well, he'd have wanted just a little more, and one thing might have led to another.

So, what with the heat and everything, one night Maureen thought she just couldn't live any longer unless she took a swim in the Ditch. To cool off, you know. And she had to creep and creep to get out without waking anyone, and she didn't dare look around for her bathing-suit, but practically no one ever comes along that road at night so she didn't worry. She just plain forgot about Jerry Biedelmeyer. Or so she says. Don't you, honey?

Well, she was in the Ditch and she saw the lights of a car in the distance, and she completely lost her head, and instead of ducking under the water she climbed out and tried to reach the shelter of the paternal roof. But of course the car was coming much faster than she thought, and it slowed up at the bend, and in fact it had to stop dead because someone had left her father's hand-truck sticking way out into the road.

And there was Maureen, riveted to the spot, in the full glare of the headlights, right up against the face of that enormous rock where there's not even as much as a bush or a blade of grass for

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cover. Of course she was terribly upset, and I must say for Jerry that he was very chivalrous and instead of driving off hell for leather as perhaps some men would have done, he got out and consoled her to the best of his ability.

You may imagine that these stories burst upon Elinor with all the brightness of Jerry Biedelmeyer's headlights, making clear the road she was to follow, but if you do you will be very wrong. She felt and showed the natural degree of amusement, but once she had rejoined the other group the incidents themselves faded from her mind, or sank into it, leaving only a bright residue, like panned-out gold, to add to the excitement and admiration she felt for a life that was so free and cheerful and worked out so well in the end.

So much to the contrary that, had she remembered these stories in detail, I think she would not have done what she did, because then an element of calculation would have entered in, such as would have been entirely incompatible with the love that irradiated her whole being. Her mind and her body were now unanimous in telling her that this love was beautiful and right.

It is one of the lovely dangers of unfilled love, or lust, as you, my dear sir, like to call it, that when the body and mind are in complete harmony it is because the latter has made all the necessary concessions. And it is one of the lovely dangers of stories we have heard and forgotten that they sometimes reappear apparelled in all the glory and Eden-freshness of absolute originality.

During the weeks that followed, Elinor, though she tried hard to be sensible, began to be a little less convinced that there was nothing that Henry McBride could ever see in her.

This was a serious error, for Henry McBride, like a knight in a legend, was already unshakeably dedicated to a damsel he had seen in a vision, of whom he knew neither her name nor her dwelling, nor what wastes he might have to traverse or ogres to overcome in order to find and win her, but only that she combined the face of Maureen Biedelmeyer with the fortune of Rachel Bickling.

But although Elinor's error was grave, it was not an entirely presumptuous one. After all, Mr. McBride, though damnably likely to succeed, is only in the early stages. He is a newcomer, a partner so junior in his firm that he is practically an employee. Elinor was able tenderly to regard him as nearer her own status than that of the wealthy young men of Vallombrosa.

His kindnesses continued, and they were marked by an indefinable something that seemed to suggest he would be yet warmer

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and closer if only he could bring himself to overstep some little barrier that lay between himself and Elinor. The plain truth is that, endeavouring through Elinor to curry favour with Mrs. Dunlop, he economically used up for the purpose what might be described as left-overs from his treatment of the older lady.

His manner was at once caressing and respectful, at once familiar and shy. It was exactly right for use on a lady of Mrs. Dunlop's age and wealth and position, where the barrier would be naturally ascribed to a proper diffidence, but to Elinor this manner was deceptive in the extreme.

Her body, flushing at a familiar word and throbbing at the remembrance of a caressing smile, poured forth through every gland an intoxicating insistence that the most beautiful interpretation must be the true one, and that all his little advances were the expression of a state of being in love without knowing it, as on the films, and that his shy retreats before the unspecified barrier were due to her unfortunate face.

Elinor and her body now being one, she had come to disown her face. It was this alien and falsifying face that stood in the way of the unspeakable happiness that being in love and knowing it might bring to Mr. Henry McBride.

On the night of the triumphant production of the *Lysistrata*, Elinor got rid of her face. The masks, executed by Parrot and Bigelow, were simple, light and airy, and extremely attractive. They were done in somewhat the classical manner, but softened and sweetened as if for a rather good perfume advertisement.

In combination with the tennis dresses and sandals the effect was not at all as bad as it sounds, and Fleming Parrot had been careful to arrange a variety of poses for Elinor such as were admirably adapted to bring out the full persuasiveness of her arguments in the cause of peace. Certain of these poses brought her into the most thrilling relationship with Henry McBride himself, who was also playing a small effective part.

Our Drama Group has the advantage of a friendly audience; applause and curtain calls are accorded even to its worst failures. The *Lysistrata*, so Greek, so modern, so sexy, so bawdy, and yet perfectly all right because it's a classic, received a positive ovation. Every performer who had a part with a name to it had to take an individual bow, and in a spotlight as bright as the headlights of Jerry Biedelmeyer's car.

The curtain was lowered and champagne, like a condensation of the applause, popped and foamed and bubbled in everyone's hand. Tongues wagged nineteen to the dozen. Everyone congratulated everyone else.

Elinor, you looked absolutely beautiful. I was watching you

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from the wings. If you'd had no arms and no clothes I'd have thought you were the Venus de Milo.

Some people went up to change and others stayed on the stage talking. More people went up, and at last no one was left but Henry McBride and Elinor and a couple of others. Henry went up and Elinor shortly followed him. The other two went off to dressing-rooms near the swimming-pool because there was no room for all the cast in the building behind the stage.

I don't know, gentlemen, if you are familiar with the layout of the Country Club. Behind the big hall where the stage is put up there is an old wooden building, its upper floor approached by an outside staircase. This in the old days contained the changing-rooms for our golf and tennis players.

The ladies' showers are at one end—the gentlemen's at the other. Next to the ladies' showers was Elinor's cubicle, which was very small, as it had been stolen from the shower-room at a time when the pressure on space was increasing and our handsome new changing-rooms had not yet been built. Before that, the next cubicle to Elinor's had opened into the showers, and this advantage was repeated in the one she occupied.

Thus she had a door through which she entered, a window opposite, a door on her left to the showers, and a door to her right that led to the next cubicle, which was occupied by Mr. Henry McBride.

On her way up the outside staircase Elinor met a whole stream of those who had retired earlier, changed, and were on their way to the bar. In the corridor above she found an air of emptiness.

This little wooden building is hot at night. Elinor's window was open. Through this window came the heavy scent of a datura blooming in the shrubbery below, and a babble of voices from the nearby bar. But almost at once the voices were submerged under the sound of the radio, tuned up too high, playing *Some Enchanted Evening*.

Elinor, transported by applause and praise, her mask pushed back on to the top of her head, looked into the long glass and pulled her mask into place again. She unbuttoned and shed her tennis tunic and got rid of certain other things she was wearing, resolving as she did so not to do what she was going to do. She looked into the glass again, and it was beautiful and it was *right*.

One of those small voices which go on coldly and quietly somewhere deep in our heads even in our most exalted moments suggested: I opened the wrong door; I thought it was the shower. The voice on the radio sang: *You will see a stranger*. And the wordless voice of her body also surged up like music to which she had no difficulty in fitting words of the purest poetry,

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and so *right*. He will see me. He will know. He will come towards me. He will take me in his arms . . .

Whereupon, simple, deluded, burning with love, lovely in her nakedness and her mask, she threw open the door and stood like an amorous goddess on the threshold of the dressing-room of Mr. Henry McBride.

In company with Mr. Henry McBride were seated, a little fatigued, listening to the music, Mrs. Dunlop, Mrs. Carter, old Mr. Frisbee and his grandson Max, just back at home after his first term at Groton. There were a few seconds, which seemed longer, of absolute petrifaction on the part of everyone present.

The effects of shock are known to us all. Lawyers advise that, should we become involved in a car crash, we should say as little as possible for fear of making some damaging admission. Elinor, as honest a girl as ever breathed, stood stunned, forgetful of the excuse about the shower, until, pushing up her mask as if to lay bare the last miserable absurdity of the situation, she allowed the truth to burst up out of this inconvenient honesty of hers.

I thought you were alone, she said.

Mr. McBride's high squeak of repudiation was masterly and convincing. God knows what Elinor thought he might have said, assuming she was capable of thinking at all. God knows what he could have said to save her, even assuming he had wanted to. Nevertheless, I take the liberty of hating his guts for not saying it. He was voluble enough with his assurances and his denials when at last the door slammed behind her.

Next day, of course, Elinor resigned from the Club, as was right, proper, and universally expected of her. From the material point of view it seems to have been a little precipitate, for had she waited until her resignation was demanded she would almost certainly have had her entrance fee refunded her. With $500 she could have gone away and found a new job. As it was, she was unable to.

I hope I have sufficiently answered your questions, gentlemen. It is nearly two o'clock. I must be getting back to the inquest.

★ ★ ★

AND SO TIBET

If there are times when counting sheep
Does not succeed in wooing sleep,
Do like the lamas when they hit their sacks
Count yaks.

ROD MACLEAN

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WHALE KILLER

Warm crimson was turning to purple smoke in the sea

BY JOHN KRUSE

THE big bronze-and-yellow car had come round the three-sided bay in a smooth rush, ignoring the customs control and winding between the banana crates and knots of labourers without slowing down. Now it stopped with a yelp of tyres on the quay. It rocked heavily once as the fat man got out.

Dark eyes watched him from hot decks as he put away his tinted glasses and came heavily down the steps to where the whaling gunboat sat high and ugly in the water.

"Mama mia!" Luis said, forgetting to haul on the harpoon strap. "I am having a dream."

Manoel made the last turn of marline-seizing on the harpoon pole and looked up, following his gaze.

There was a woman in the open car. She sat motionless under a wide hat, looking away along the quay. She was slim with high cheekbones and petal-smooth skin.

"Isn't that the singer?" Luis whispered.

The fat man had straddled the gap onto the deck and now looked at Manoel and Luis with unnaturally bright eyes. An aura of physical deterioration hung about him such as Manoel had never seen—great devastated shoulders and collapsed belly muscles. Manoel pointed to the wheelhouse. The man stepped up and in, watching where he put his feet, as though anxious not to discredit himself.

Manoel leaned the harpoon against the prow rail and, glancing at Luis, padded after him on his hard bare feet.

"Bom dia!" Senhor Gouveia's voice called out. His grey hair and intelligent brown face poked up the ladder from the chart-room.

"Ah. Good day. You are Gouveia?" The fat man spoke Portuguese with a distinguished accent. Altogether he was very distinguished.

"I am Senhor Gouveia," Gouveia said. He sprang up the ladder like a boy, smiling and very neat in his grey suit, and under the grey suit as hard as iron. They shook hands.

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" Oliviera at the Maritime Office said that you are the man I must see. You are what—forgive me—the whaling manager? "

" A director of the company."

" So? So. Well . . ."

" What can I do for you, senhor? "

The fat man shifted his feet. The pause was only momentary. " I want to kill a whale."

Gouveia blinked a little and smiled at him, awaiting his explanation.' " You want to kill a whale? "

" Yes."

The boat leaned on its moorings, which creaked lazily. Manoel could almost feel Luis's sides tense with laughter. He did not look at him; instead for some reason he glanced up at the woman. She was still staring along the quay where a grain barge was being loaded. One of the stevedores was a negro with flat buttocks and long arms and muscles that gleamed like the coils of a snake.

Gouveia was speaking. " You are Doctor Cavaliero de Andrade, the architect, are you not? "

" But we have not met before."

" I saw you at the opening of the new Cathedral."

" Oh. Oh yes."

" A magnificent building. It must have presented many problems."

" Thank you."

" I have heard your wife sing, senhor. She is something very wonderful, the very breath of Portugal." His eyes strayed to the car. " When she sings of the sea, she sings of all that we seadogs know and feel—ask Manoel and Luis here. It is something very rare. It would be a privilege to meet her."

The fat man's back remained solidly to the car. " I am sure she would be delighted. But some other time, not today . . . Now, this business of the whale . . ."

" Ah yes. Are we to be serious about this? "

" If you please. I am not given to flippant requests. I have this need—this ambition to kill a whale. I must know how it can be arranged."

Gouveia seemed at a loss for a moment. Luis made a sound. Manoel elbowed him to silence.

Gouveia said, " May I ask, do you know anything of whaling, senhor—the methods we use? "

" You harpoon them from open boats, I believe."

" Rowboats, senhor. The harpooner darts his iron by hand."

" Man against whale—yes, yes, that is what I heard."

" When the whale is tired of running, the harpooner must then lance her. He must strike for the lungs, deep—not once, senhor,

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but again and again. The lance is eleven feet long, and heavy, and the whale is big, perhaps as long as this boat. To kill such a whale takes sometimes an hour. And there is blood, much blood. And danger, too."

"Yes—primitive! It is how I imagined it!"

Gouveia's eyes clouded. He drew back a little and frowned. "Senhor, I do not think you quite understand . . . Manoel—" He beckoned him forward. "Senhor—our chief harpooner . . ."

The fat man turned and Manoel was then able to see what was in his face. It was the way old Papa da Silva had looked when they had pushed him forward to act as their spokesman in the strike—wishing the ground could open and swallow him, but going on with it because they were all watching, steeling himself to a defiance, an arrogance that was not in his nature. Manoel raised two fingers to his cropped head.

"Manoel was in a boat that was dragged down," Gouveia said. "Do you see his throat?"

The fat man leaned forward. "It looks like a burn."

"It is a burn. When a harpooned whale sounds, senhor, the line runs from the boat so fast that water must be poured on the gunwale to prevent it catching fire. A leaping line caught him round the throat. The boat capsized and was dragged down. It was caused by a man's inexperience."

"So?" The fat man's eyes faltered fractionally. But the next moment he was speaking vigorously to Manoel. "Tell me of the whale—does he fight? Does he charge the boat?"

"Only in blindness, senhor."

"But the tail—the great tail—it has to be avoided, ah? It must be the sport of kings!"

Manoel shrugged his high powerful shoulders.

"It is a living." He was about to add, "barely," but thought better of it.

"I will be blunt, Doctor Andrade," Gouveia said. "Whaling is a question simply of teamwork. If there was only yourself to be considered I would be glad to co-operate. But I cannot possibly risk the lives of seven of my men to satisfy this—this whim of yours."

The fat man turned to him sharply. "Why not? You pay them to risk their lives, don't you? I would pay them more. We could ask for volunteers." He turned to Manoel. "Tell me, yes or no, would you be willing to take me in your boat for money? Yes or no."

Manoel hesitated.

He looked at Gouveia.

"I would pay five hundred escudos per man."

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But still he looked at Gouveia.

" A thousand, then."

Luis gasped.

" It is not only a question of the men," Gouveia said. " It is also of the boat should it be smashed. And of the equipment, and of the whales forfeited by such a destruction."

" How much would you say that would come to? "

" It is impossible to say."

" Would twenty thousand cover it? "

Gouveia expelled his breath and shook his head and laughed. " I don't know, senhor. Really—" He cast his eye about him. " Manoel—fetch me that harpoon." To Luis: " Bring a warp."

Manoel fetched the harpoon.

" Feel it, senhor," Gouveia said. " Weigh it in your hands."

The fat man took the harpoon in his hands and weighed the steel-headed, iron-shanked, wood-poled eight feet of it, not understanding its antiquity or the beauty of it, but thinking only that it was very long and very heavy.

" Could you dart that a distance of two fathoms? " Gouveia asked him. He was bending the warp to the eye-splice of the harpoon strap.

The fat man did not reply.

Gouveia made a double becket hitch, tested it, and handed the harpoon back to Manoel with a gesture towards the rail.

Manoel understood. He moved into the prow and balanced the harpoon in his hands feeling the forward weight of it, the chamfered edges of the pole sharp beneath his fingers, and it made a song in him. He looked back at the men and then suddenly up at the woman.

She had turned and was watching him with quickened interest. Something in her eyes made him want to impress her. He kicked the warp-line clear of his feet and, cupping his hand behind the butt of the pole, raised the harpoon level with his eyes. Drawing the right hand back now, drawing it back, the left giving elevation, the thighs spreading, the back arching, the feet gripping. He made all he could of it, thinking of the woman and then only of the iron, the iron with the sun on it pointing above the mountains beyond the bay. He hurled it. The harpoon flew out, along and down, entering the water with barely a splash.

" Bravo! " It came from the woman vibrantly.

Manoel bowed and smiled up at her as he hauled the iron in by the warp and handed it dripping to the fat man.

The fat man took it and Manoel sensed the anger in him. He must have understood what was expected of him but he made no move other than to test the point with one finger. His voice was

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harsh. " I will buy this from you. I will practise with it. How much? "

Gouveia reasoned with him further. But some overriding compulsion drove Andrade. When finally he had no more reasoning left in him, Gouveia turned to Manoel. The ultimate decision was up to him.

Manoel studied his scarred feet. " I will take the Senhor in my boat," he said, after what he considered to be a decent pause.

" Good. Very good. Very good indeed," the fat man said. " Thank you. And when do you next expect whales? "

" Unfortunately they are not predictable," Gouveia said, eyeing Manoel dourly. " When the lookouts sight a blow they report to us and we fire a rocket. If when you hear the rocket you come to this boat we will take you where the whaleboats are operating."

" I will post a servant to listen," the fat man said, offering his hand. " Thank you, Senhor Gouveia. I am most grateful. I look forward to the time of the rocket. It cannot be too soon."

He shook hands with Manoel, nodded to Luis, and got off the boat. In silence the three men watched him go up the steps. The woman sat motionless in the car. She glanced at him once, penetratingly, as he got in. They drove away without speaking.

" Curious," Gouveia said. " Most curious." He cocked an eyebrow at Manoel. " You should have refused him. Don't I pay you enough, you scoundrel? "

Manoel grinned. " No, senhor."

" His wife," Luis breathed. " She is much woman."

" She is not his wife," Gouveia said. " It is common knowledge. He picked her out of the gutter when she was seventeen. Influential man—great amateur athlete, too, in those days. Discus, I think. He created her from nothing."

" Then it is gratitude and not love that holds her to him. Dangerous."

Gouveia shrugged.

Luis cleared his throat, spat, and then sighed. " So beautiful, and tied to such a . . ."

" The fatness is recent. They say it came suddenly." Gouveia turned back to the wheelhouse. " And already there is talk of a young man. A slim-hipped, flat-bellied bullfighter from Cadiz . . ."

The tide rose and fell eight times in the harbour and the ninth time of rising was dawn, but the different dawn that follows moon-change—grey, with subtle influences and surgings—and with it, in answer to the altered impulses of the deep, came the whales.

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The rocket broke grey against the black mountains and Manoel, who had lit the fuse, now thumbed the gunboat's diesels to life to warm them, and checked the bearings he had taken down, half asleep, over the radio. Gouveia arrived by taxi, clear-eyed, clean-shaven, and wearing a tie.

"A school!" Manoel shouted.

"A school, man? Where?"

"Cap Girão."

"Are we all here?"

"All aboard, senhor."

"Then cast off. No, wait. What about the architect?"

"He will not come," Luis said.

"You are wrong," Manoel told him. The bronze-and-yellow car was coming towards them along the quay.

They cast off and, as the bow swung out, hauled the fat man aboard, and pulled away—watched by the chauffeur who had brought him. The woman had not come.

They rounded the mole and now met the living water and the true air and the sun low on the water, painfully bright.

Manoel breathed in; it was like stepping from the tomb. He looked at the fat man and grinned.

"Bom dia, senhor. We have a school."

The fat man nodded several times, smiling, but blank-eyed. He had not shaved and the big soft sweater he was wearing emphasized the ravages time had wrought on his physique. He looked at a disadvantage in the early morning, marooned in an unfamiliar element, sustained only by his strange compulsion.

How was she when you left, Manoel wondered. Did you leave her sleeping the bare-shouldered sleep of youth? Did you kiss her before you went quietly and, if so, how was it done, the kiss? Like a lover, or like a priest suppliant? Or did you not kiss her, fat man, but stand there wanting to, aware of your new fatness and the change in her, desperate with it and with the need to recapture what you had, what others now have? Did you? Perhaps they slept in separate rooms, Manoel thought. He understood that people of their class sometimes did.

His eyes were thoughtful as he stared ahead. It was like stepping on the stage halfway through a play and finding oneself with a part to perform. Not very easy; he hoped he would not make a mistake.

The town sank swiftly in their wake, the sun rising, the sea spreading out till there was nothing but sea, except where, diminished but still mighty, stood the cliffs of Girão. Then Manoel saw the boats, two motorboats and five whaleboats, scattered across the seascape and already hunting.

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" Baleia! " cried the mast lookout. " Thar she blows! "

The fat man leaned towards him and Manoel pointed to a puff of white, like a shell burst, vanishing above the water. Then to another. Another. Still another. There were whales everywhere, invisible as yet with the distance, but clearly a big school.

Ten minutes of running, and then one of the motorboats swung alongside, grey and battered, her crew flushed and shouting to the crew of the gunboat. Behind her, still under tow, was Manoel's whaleboat waiting for him, her crew of six standing at their oars, caps doffed in greeting, broad grins on their faces.

Manoel jumped backwards down into the bows and reached up for Andrade. All had been warned about the fat man, and all were willing, happy at the chance of extra money. Sinewy arms almost lifted the bulky body into the bucking boat, held onto him to check him from falling.

" What do I do—where do I go—tell me! " The shiny black eyes were leaping with excitement and apprehension.

" In the bows—mind the whale-line—this thwart—" The whaleboat swung clear of the gunboat. " Sit down—keep calm, senhor."

" But what do I do—where are the whales? "

" Patience, senhor. Patience." Manoel swiftly checked the equipment, bracing himself against the pull of the oarsmen. *One and then pull. Two and then pull.* Harpoon tilted bowsprit-wise over the snatch-blocks. First ten fathoms of whale-line, called the boxline, becket-hitched to the harpoon strap and coiled neatly on the harpooner's platform.

Danger, Manoel thought. Catch his foot in that and he'll go down with the whale. He pushed the coils well to starboard. Then the whale-line proper, running back down the centre of the boat across the looms of the alternate oars, rippling now with their movement, round the stern loggerhead, and then forward again into the line-tubs amidships—the four hundred yards of all-important, neatly coiled, sea-bleached nylon whale-line, checked and re-checked for knots and frays. Danger in that too, if Andrade fouled it. But Manoel's job was to see that he didn't.

Paolo, the squat, thrustful boatman, standing face-forward at the stern oar, watched him make his check impatiently. He knew the risk of what they were doing, but he was old in risk and he knew Manoel and he knew the five wiry oarsmen now pulling in perfect unison, their keen eyes on his face, which was their word of command, their telegraph, and their warning light. He knew them and was impatient and they read his impatience and speeded the stroke.

Manoel came back and unpeaked the bow oar and fell into

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rhythm with the rest. *One and two. One and two.* Faster now. The graceful craft slid through the water.

Already Paolo had selected his quarry. The body of the school was inshore of them. It had split up into "families" at the sudden arrival of the whaleboats and now eddied hither and thither confused by the vibration of the boat engines. They were the cow whales, the calves and yearlings, and their speed and the depth of their sounding was limited to the capabilities of the smallest and youngest. Paolo scorned such prey. He leaned heavily on the steering-oar and swung their head out to sea.

The fat man, tensed on the bow thwart, saw then what Paolo had seen, and gasped. Two great bulls had surfaced ahead of them. Their spouting burst like gunsmoke on the waves. They were the leaders, the caliphs of the harem, grey and long and blunt and glistening, heading as if powered by silent turbines straight for the open sea.

Manoel heard the gasp and glanced round, glanced back at Paolo sharply. Paolo showed his yellow teeth and nodded as if to say, "You can handle it, man." Manoel shook his head and jerked his chin back towards the school. Paolo grinned and held his course.

Paolo was after ambergris, Manoel knew—the whaler's pearl that is a gallstone of the bull and only the bull. But now wasn't the time: the fat man couldn't manage a bull. But as he looked again and saw the whales were close and still hadn't sounded, his prudence faltered. The darting was the same for one sex as for the other, only what followed was different, and that he could assist in, take over if need be. The fever began low down inside him—the old fever. He bent to the quickening pace.

Now for the six oarsmen it was all in Paolo's face. They watched it as a sect watches its prophet—a reddened face with ginger stubble, an ugly face under a torn cap, craning and squinting—but just now the most interesting face in all the world.

It told of two bulls at middle distance, that they were still blowing and that there was still time, but only so much of it, that the great bodies were already almost charged with oxygen and at a shout or the thump of an oar would sound easily, continuing their run at great depth and in a changed direction.

The sounding could last for an hour, so the approach was crucial. Paolo's lips formed the words, "*Força! Força!*" and the pace began to mount, faster and faster, till the white craft truly knifed through the water, its oars beating silently and as one, like a many-pinioned gull.

The fat man twisted round on his thwart and stared wildly

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back along the boat, then stared forward again. The whales were a hundred yards distant now. They were monsters, machines of unbelievable size and power. He gripped Manoel's shoulder, but Manoel ignored him. Supremely agitated, Andrade staggered to his feet, fell back heavily.

He was floundering in the bilges entangled in the whale-line when Manoel peaked his oar suddenly and came forward to him. A hand clamped upon his upper arm and he was suddenly on his feet, his hands being guided to the gunwale and fastened there like inanimate clips.

"Watch." Manoel had the harpoon in his hands. He took up a stance on the darting-platform and demonstrated the use of the thighboard, bracing his thigh against the shaped wood. He pointed to the position of his feet and to the boxline with a gesture of warning. "Take off your shoes."

The fat man kicked his shoes off, the harpoon was thrust into his hand and, before he knew what was happening, his left leg was rammed hard against the thighboard, his hands almost crushed into position on the pole by Manoel's hands, and raised for him to the requisite height and angle.

"No—I was mad! This is wrong! I can't do it!"

"Push the iron—do not throw. Aim forward of the hump. I will tell you when."

"Where—which whale? It's all too much. I can't endanger you all like this!"

"The direction of the boat will show you which one."

"But what if—"

"Hush." Manoel pointed. The bulls were forty yards ahead and, above the swish of the waves and the grunting of the crew, could be heard now the breathing of the whales—great hollow sighs of indescribable desolation.

"Mother of God." The fat man lowered the harpoon, staring at them, and Manoel saw in his eyes that he was going to fail in the dart.

He reached out and gripped the fleshy hands to the harpoon and drew it back.

"What are you doing? No—let go!" Andrade wrestled the iron free. "I—I will do it." He levelled it, crouching.

Manoel drew back, uncertain, ready for whatever was to happen.

The two grey backs loomed ahead of them. Paolo was steering for the larger. Ten yards to go . . .

"Steady." Manoel hooked his toes under the platform and leaned back over the gunwale to give him darting space.

The whales went under together, their shadows stretching enormous beneath the surface.

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"They've gone!"

"No. Wait for it. Wait for it . . ."

Up they came, their heads featureless as submarines, the air swathering through their blowholes to explode in bursts of vapour as they broke the surface, their backs—

"See the hump! See the hump! Now!"

The fat man stared round at him wildly and hurled the harpoon with all his weight behind it. The pole crabbed a little, but the preponderance of iron in front and the boxline behind corrected it. It struck the great flank level with and slightly to one side of the dorsal hump, bedded in the soft blubber.

There was a bump as the boat struck the back. It lifted as the whale "rounded out." Manoel tensed himself for the impact of the lifting flukes which could shatter them. It did not come.

The boat subsided into the water. Both whales were gone. With the cheers of the crew ringing in his ears, Manoel scooped up the boxline in his two hands and dropped it over the side like a wreath, directed the whale-line into the grooved snatch-blocks wrenched the fat man's paralysed hands from the gunwale and shouldered him clear of the line.

The fat man stumbled back onto a thwart. "What happened? Did I hit it?" The voice was dazed.

"We are fastened, senhor. See the line." The whale-line had already begun to run.

It whined out over the chocks. The men were peaking their oars and standing up, grinning.

"Bravo, senhor! Bravo!"

"The Senhor has fastened his first whale!"

"Bravo the Senhor!"

"Good!" Paolo was shouting from the stern. "Good!" And there was no irony in it, but some amazement and not a little relief.

The fat man seemed scarcely to hear. He stared grey-faced at the whale-line. "God, how it runs! It was a monster. A giant. Such strength."

Manoel smiled. "A good bull, senhor. About thirty-five barrels. Cigarette?"

The fat man seemed unable to tear his eyes from the whistling line. At last he looked at the cigarette and then in surprise at Manoel. "What are we doing?"

"Waiting, senhor. The whale is sounding. When she ceases to sound she will run. Then we will run with her."

Andrade nodded vaguely; then clapped his palms to his eyes. "I don't know . . . Risking lives like this—*your lives*!" He turned to Manoel. "You should have stopped me!"

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Manoel lit a cigarette. "That was not the arrangement, senhor."

"Arrangement!" The fat man spoke very swiftly and very quietly. "We have a little talent that earns a little money; and we buy an arrangement. Like small children, we want something and we are going to get it, so we buy an arrangement, not caring if it costs lives, how many or whose. I have not the strength in my body to complete this thing—you had better know that—know it now—and tell me what to do before I make a mistake and kill the lot of us!"

Manoel eyed him for a moment, keeping his face expressionless. He glanced briefly back along the boat. The others were talking among themselves, not listening. "The Senhor speaks from reaction. His arm is still strong or we would not have fastened."

"Fastened! A single thrust!"

"You have weight, senhor—"

"What use is weight? I tell you now, the sight of blood sickens me."

"Weight used correctly is strength."

"But not stamina. Lord above, I know about these things. I used to be—"

"I know, senhor." Manoel leaned back over the side to check the angle of the line in the water. He wished to appear quite steady. This was the old battle, where doubt was the enemy; he must not contribute to it.

"How is it your end?" he called to Paolo. To Andrade he added quietly, "I am content, senhor."

"She has already swallowed one hundred and fifty metres," Paolo answered.

"She is making for the bottom." Manoel said it cheerfully, but with a sideways glance at the thighboard knife. He could feel the fat man's burning eyes upon him. He did not look at him.

Manoel was wrong. At three hundred metres the whale levelled off and began to run. Seeing the changed angle of the line in the water, Manoel gave a shout. With a grunt of relief Paolo threw a turn of the line about the loggerhead and snubbed it. The boat began to move. It glided swiftly, eerily, through the water.

The men stood by their peaked oars, hands in pockets, smoking, and discussing what the other boats were doing. The fat man crouched on the thwart watching Manoel prepare the lances. He was shuddering. "What does he feel down there in the blackness?" he asked suddenly. "My harpoon—does it give him much pain?"

Manoel laughed. "He is stupid, senhor. He feels the drag

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of the boat and he is puzzled. But there is no pain, senhor."

"How do you know, you fool—how can you tell? The creature has blood and senses, hasn't it? You lie to vindicate your trade!"

A sudden silence settled over the boat. Heads turned.

Manoel took it easily. "There is no pain. It is well known."

He busied himself with the lances. He worked on them without looking up for several minutes. The crew watched him and the fat man silently. Finally they turned away and resumed their chatter.

The towing behind the whale lasted three-quarters of an hour. The creature surfaced and sounded a score of times, drawing the boat first this way, then that, now rushing through the water, now slowing, the soundings becoming all the time shallower and more frequent until at last the sixty-foot sperm-whale lay exhausted on the surface a hundred yards from the boat.

Manoel watched it for a few moments. "She is ready," he said.

Without a word the crew began to haul up on the whale, Paolo coiling the dripping whale-line on the after platform. Manoel raised the great lance and stamped it upright. He looked squarely at the fat man.

"It is time, senhor."

Andrade was staring as though hypnotized at the great length and cleanness and power of line of the conquered but far from dead bull. He started to shake his head, checked himself. He made the sign of the cross at his throat. "Give it to me."

Manoel handed him the lance, smiling, flipped the whale-line from the chocks to the starboard bow cleat so that they were bow-on to the whale, ready for lancing.

The great shape loomed up in front of them, its blowing enormous. The fat man braced himself, holding the lance awkwardly.

"As for the harpoon—but aim low on the flank," Manoel told him. "For the lung."

Andrade raised the heavy lance. The boat was swinging in alongside the creature, Paolo snubbing the line, the men rapidly unpeaking their oars ready for trouble.

"Now!" Manoel cried.

The fat man heaved the lance towards the whale and let go. It splashed into the water a few yards from the boat.

"Again!" The second lance was thrust into his hand. The whale was running now, dragging them along parallel to it.

"I haven't the strength. I haven't the strength."

"You have weight, senhor. Use it."

Andrade hurled the lance desperately. It fell short again.

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The whale went under in a great boil of foam which rocked the boat and drenched them. "It's no use, I tell you!"

"Harder!" Manoel yelled. He had hauled in the first lance by its warp and thrust it dripping into the fat man's hands.

The whale came up. "Now!"

Again the lance splashed short. The fat man was almost weeping.

"Closer!" Manoel signalled the crew.

The oars drove them forward and Paolo took a fresh bite on the line. "Now!"

Andrade buried his teeth in his lip and drove the lance diagonally at the gleaming back, the thunder of the blowing in his ears. The five-foot iron struck the flank, bedded in the soft blubber to its pole. There was a jarring thump. "A rib!" Manoel cried, dragging the lance out by its warp. Blood spurted—crimson turning to purple smoke in the sea—mammal blood, warm blood.

Andrade swung away and went down on his knees, his head over the side. The reaction took Manoel by surprise. "Get up!" He gripped him by the shoulder. "Now you have her—get up!"

The bulky figure clung like a limpet to the gunwale.

"Listen to me—" Manoel cried in his ear, "we are in great danger bowed in so close. If you do not strike we shall have to loosen line!"

Water deluged over them as the whale smashed down with its flukes, driving Manoel against the fat man's back. He gripped the shoulder, shook it.

"Get up or I shall take her myself!"

No response.

Manoel stood back, hard-mouthed. His words were calculated. "All right. I, Manoel, will take her for you! Go back and tell your woman and her young men how it happened—that you were too old and fat and finished to do this thing that could have made you a man!"

He mounted the platform and dragged the half-floating lance inboard. The fat man came to his feet. White-faced and red-mouthed, his cheeks streaked with tears, he seized the iron of the lance, jerked the butt of it hard into Manoel's solar plexus, and wrenched it away from him.

The next instant he had hurled it towards the whale and Manoel was down on the boards, gasping.

In the vacuum of utter airlessness Manoel saw him take the second lance and dart it after the first. He tried to warn him that the whale was rolling, that there was danger in lancing a rolling whale, but no words at all would come.

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The lance bedded in the revolving body, swung up, round, and under. Manoel felt the loose coils of the warp suddenly struggle beneath him, begin to leap up over the side. Something tightened round his right arm and he was dragged hard up against the gunwale. The boat tilted and bore in towards the whale.

Paolo was bellowing, "The knife! The knife!" It was strapped to the thighboard but the fat man stood paralysed, incapable.

In another moment the boat would be over.

Manoel found his breath. He got his knees under him and in great pain lunged with his free hand for the knife. Water came in over the gunwale. A cuddy box hit him in the back. The next moment he was snatched into the sea and felt himself drawn towards the whale.

In a confusion of foam he struck face first against the oily blubber, was dragged up, over, and down—down under the water.

The whaleboat righted with a jar that sent the crew sprawling. The fat man clung to the snatch-blocks aware that something terrible had happened for which he was responsible. He understood that the whale was winding in the warp and that the warp was attached to the thighboard. He wrenched at the hitches trying to tear them loose, and his fingers encountered the knife in its nailed sheath.

He drew it out and with a moan of relief hacked at the warp, severing it.

The boat, though released, was hard up against the side of the whale, bucking wildly with the movement, the crew back-paddling to try and pull clear. Andrade's awe-filled eyes saw something swing up past his face from almost under the boat and heave away over the whale's back.

It was Manoel!

Horror struggled with the knowledge that at any moment the whale might submerge, dragging the harpooner down. He wanted to shut his eyes and turn away. But this force in him that had driven him to attempt the killing of a whale—a force more terrifying to him than any whale—would not let him. With full awareness of his own age and weakness, he jumped into the water.

The boat pulled away from him and, alone in the sea which churned under him and over him, gasping and conscious of the closeness of death, but with the knife still in his hand, the fat man swam towards the whale.

He could see the lines encircling the body, groped for them, was buffeted back. Something struck him from beneath: it was Manoel.

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The crew in the boat, watching fascinated, saw the two of them lifted as one, saw the striking hand of the fat man, the glitter of the knife, then they were gone, over and away and down.

The whale righted itself in the water and rounded its back and lifted its flukes against the sun. A great groan went up from the men as it slid under the sea. Nothing remained on the surface but a glassy trail of oil. In the stillness that followed could be heard only the whining of the unattended line as it ran out after the whale.

Then suddenly, unbelievably, two heads broke through the oily surface.

Paolo's eyes flared open. He clambered up onto the after platform and threw his weight against the steering-oar.

" In! " he bellowed. " Glory be to the Mother of God—in! "

There was a crowd on the quay when the gunboat put into harbour that night. Gouveia had radioed back for a doctor to meet them to set Manoel's dislocated shoulder, and news of a whaling accident had spread fast through the town. The press was there, and so was the bronze-and-yellow car. Waiting by the car was the chauffeur—but no woman.

The fat man had not killed his whale—after the accident and before anyone could stop him, Paolo had cut the bull loose—but there was all the same a new and powerful light in Andrade's eyes as he shook hands with Gouveia and then clasped Manoel's left hand in both of his, silently. He walked away up the steps onto the quay.

His big, once-athletic body was set square beneath the briny stiffness of his clothes as he got into the car. Flash-bulbs flickered. The chauffeur put the car into gear and drove him away.

Manoel watched the car diminish.

He shook his head thoughtfully. " I wonder what will happen to him," he said.

" It will be in the papers," Gouveia replied. " I will tell the reporters what happened. He will come out of it very well."

" I mean how will it be between him and the woman—after she finds that he has become a hero."

Gouveia shrugged. " Who can tell? "

Someone hailed him—it was the doctor coming aboard. He added, turning away, " She will understand and take pity on him, I expect."

The meaning of the remark did not immediately reach Manoel. But afterwards he thought what a curious thing it was to say. He did not even then fully understand it until he had transferred

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the problem to himself and remembered, with a start, the wonderful, sometimes almost-motherly affection of his own wife.

Love is strange, he thought. The more fiercely we seek her, the more consolingly, protectively she comes. Almost as if the more venturesome we are the more childish she thinks us.

It was a disturbing thought and one that he could make no sense of at all.

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY COMPETITION

Argosy readers are a well-informed group and occasionally write in about some story suggesting that, for instance, sharks prefer to nibble their victims before taking a real good bite, or that the bedroom curtains in the Hotel del Sol, Santiago, are pink, not yellow. We are at great pains to check details of this kind, and reckon that most of our stories are one hundred per cent accurate, but just for fun we print below a paragraph from a story that has *not* yet been checked; we shall award two guineas to the first postcard correctly listing its errors received after August 20. Address to The Editor, Argosy, The Fleetway House, London E.C.4.

" Leiutenant-Constable Hogan alighted at the *Gare du Nord* and walked to Florian's, where he sat sipping *entente cordiale.* It was August; the old flower-women were selling snowdrops. Suddenly Hogan leapt to his feet. " You! " he said. Pulling a Luger .49 from her tiny, frilled apron pocket the waitress shot him dead."

Calling Overseas Readers—Our editorial hearts have been wrung by a cry from a New Zealand reader:

" *Please, Dear Editor,*
This plea ends our rhyme.
EITHER A SEPARATE COMPETITION
Or extended time."

So we are setting a separate Competition for Overseas Readers *only*—entries on or before October 1, please, addressed as above.

Harry Graham once wrote:

" *The author, working like a beav.,*
His readers' pleasure could redoub.
Did he but now and then abbrev.
The work he gives his pub.
(*This view I most partic. suggest*
To A. C. Bens. and G. K. Chest.) "

We invite overseas readers to send in a verse, modelled on the above, synopsizing the Argosy story they have enjoyed most in the past year. Three guineas goes to the one we like best.

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★ *It isn't always the onlooker who sees most of the game —or is it—when he happens to be a serving officer with a lively sense of humour? This short story by Captain H. Astbury, D.S.C., is a prizewinner in the Seafarers' Education Service Competition.*

CASE DISMISSED

BY H. ASTBURY

WITH a good deal of cursing and unnecessary loss of temper, the last liberty drifter drew alongside H.M. Destroyer *Wexhound*, and liberty-men in various stages of sobriety scrambled over the guardrails and mustered in some sort of order to await inspection.

Dusty Miller, one time three-badge but now, owing to a slight difference of opinion between himself and the Captain, two-badge A.B., edged himself to the rear of the line and stared fixedly ahead. The two pint bottles of beer, which in the canteen had seemed to fit so invisibly into his oilskin pockets, now seemed to the embarrassed Dusty to have increased their size to quart bottles, and to cause such enormous bulges as to make him appear deformed.

"Curse Bloggs," he reflected bitterly. He should never have allowed himself to be persuaded by that thirsty gentleman, temporarily under stoppage of leave, into bringing back beer. The Old Man was red-hot on it, and it would probably cost Dusty his other two badges if he was caught.

He gazed with interested eyes at the wardroom door. Who was Duty Officer? It had been the Midshipman when he went ashore, he was usually easy, but one never knew. Suddenly he gasped with horror: Jimmy . . . or Jimmy-the-One by which title the First Lieutenant is known to the lower deck. Curse Bloggs and his craving for beer! Jimmy missed very little, and a seaman wearing an oilskin when it wasn't raining was sure to catch his suspicious eye.

This was the last time he would play the good Samaritan, Dusty thought bitterly. Jimmy, who suspected, but was unable to prove the identity of the person who had cleverly sold a coil of two-inch rope, last time they were in Malta . . .

"Ah, Miller," said the First Lieutenant fixing a cynical and

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suspicious eye on the uncomfortable A.B. "Expecting rain?"

"No, sir," muttered Miller nervously, "I was feeling cold so I put my oilskin on."

"Did you," snarled the First Lieutenant—two-inch rope was hard to come by, and that missing coil had been near to his heart—"I suppose you've got a sweater in your pocket as well, in fact, in both pockets?"

And Miller, silently cursing the thirsty Bloggs, prepared for the worst. This proved to be as bad as expected, and five minutes later a furious Miller "charged with smuggling beer on board," departed towards the messdeck and the cause of his downfall, A.B. Bloggs, his one-time crony and companion in crime.

That gentleman, seated in the most comfortable seat in the messdeck, as is the right of a three-badge A.B., greeted him benignly. "What ho, Dusty, get the beer? You've been a heck of a time getting back—I'm just about parched."

"Are you?" roared the infuriated Dusty. "Not as parched as I feel. Jimmy found the beer."

"What?" said the shocked Bloggs, "Jimmy's got my beer—well, your beer?" he added hastily, as he realized the unpleasant position of the owner of the beer. "I think it's ruddy careless of you."

"Careless of me!" howled the apoplectic Miller. "Do you realize I'll lose my two badges over this—just for the sake of two lousy bottles of beer? I was a fool to say I'd bring it back."

"Now, now, Dusty, it's no use getting excited," Bloggs said tartly. "Perhaps Jimmy won't do anything more about it now he's got the beer."

"Won't he!" sneered the enraged Miller. "Well, I'm in his report to start with, and I'll lose my badges tomorrow."

"You can't lose them tomorrow, it's Sunday," said Bloggs, and Miller fought to retain his self-control.

Nothing further happened the next day, though the stricken Miller, catching the First Lieutenant's eye at Divisions, was convinced that that worthy Officer was gloating in anticipation. Even the more practical Bloggs, who had spent a profitable hour cross-examining the steward, was forced to fear the worst. The beer was carefully locked away on the bottom shelf of the ward-room cupboard, and the steward had been threatened with dire punishment if it should disappear. Jimmy was taking no risks with Exhibit A . . .

A.B. Bloggs, quartermaster of the 8-to-12 watch, rested his elbows on the rail and considered; that was one of the advantages of being quartermaster, one had time to consider. His thoughts

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were not pleasant, though. His old pal Dusty had climbed into his hammock an hour ago in a sulky silence; in fact, he had been cold and unresponsive all day, reflected Bloggs gloomily. One would almost think that Dusty was annoyed.

Bloggs was recalled to his surroundings by the arrival of the last boat from the shore, bringing off the officers, and he gazed with distaste at the Navigator and the two Subs accompanying him. They had obviously been celebrating, and were in high spirits. Officers could get away with that, thought Bloggs unkindly, only poor hard-working ratings were picked up for being happy.

The Navigator swung himself over the rail in a manner which even the biased Bloggs was forced to admit did not point to even an odd one over the eight, and, landing lightly on the deck, grinned at the mournful-looking Bloggs.

" Hullo, Bloggs, you don't look too happy. Got toothache? Has the steward turned in? " he added.

" Yes, sir," replied Bloggs, " the officer of the day has the keys." Bloggs knew from experience that officers returning from shore leave usually had a nightcap before turning in.

" Right," said the Navigator briskly, " put some beer in the fridge for me—I'll let you have it if you come along. Get the keys."

Bloggs collected the keys as instructed and rolled along to the wardroom, arriving in time to see the Navigator dragged to the deck by two enthusiastic Sub-Lieutenants, and a Midshipman who, hearing the mock battle raging, had hurried from his cabin to hurl himself gleefully into the fray. All too often it was he who was rolled in the wardroom carpet to illustrate the most effective method of putting out the flames of a person on fire, and the Navigator was usually the instigator of such attacks. Revenge was sweet.

Half smothered in the carpet, as he was, the Navigator caught sight of the grinning Bloggs and even in his extremity managed to gasp, " Put three beers in the fridge—we'll need them after this," and returned with intense concentration to the task of putting a third turn in the ear of the Midshipman, who had been rash enough to place it within reach of his one free hand.

Stepping gingerly over the striving bodies, Bloggs opened the cupboard, removed three bottles of beer and, once more avoiding the thrashing legs, departed in the direction of the fridge . . .

" Morning, everyone." The First Lieutenant entered the wardroom and stalked morosely to his seat at the head of the table. He was never at his best first thing in the morning.

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"I'll need you at Defaulters this morning, Sub," he said, after he had consumed his first cup of coffee, and life was once more becoming livable. "I want to see Miller about that beer. He'll go in the Captain's report," he added grimly. "I'm just about fed up with him and Bloggs. They are never out of trouble. You might get the beer out if you've finished your breakfast. Two pint bottles—you'll see them on the bottom shelf, they have green caps."

"Right, sir," replied the Sub. "Have you got the keys, Pilot?"

Having obtained them, he returned to the cupboard containing the beer. "Did you say green caps, No. 1?" he asked after a few moments.

"Yes, on the bottom shelf by themselves," replied the First Lieutenant.

"There's no beer here," said the Sub slowly, "at least not with green caps."

"Must be there, I put it in the cupboard myself," said the First Lieutenant testily, "and I gave the Chief Steward instructions that it was on no account to be touched. Here, let me look."

After a few moments he straightened himself and stared at the assembled officers. "Has anybody had any beer out of here?" he asked grimly.

"Yes, I had a bottle," said the Sub, "but I didn't touch that beer," he added hastily. "We all knew which was which. I don't think any of the officers would touch it."

"Who else would go in there?" snapped the First Lieutenant, and the Navigator suddenly gasped.

"Bloggs!" he said in a startled voice.

"Bloggs?" said the First Lieutenant. "What would he be doing in here?"

"We were fooling around last night and I asked Bloggs to put three bottles of beer in the fridge."

"Bloggs . . ." snarled the First Lieutenant. "What happened to the beer?"

"We drank it," said the Navigator weakly.

"Drank it!" howled the First Lieutenant. "You've drunk my evidence!" As the full realization came to him he almost wept, and the look he turned on the Navigator caused him to mutter something about important chart corrections and depart with great speed from the wardroom.

The First Lieutenant stared bitterly at his empty coffee cup. He knew his Captain only too well—Captain's Defaulters on the *Wexhound* were apt to follow the pattern of a magistrate's court, and it was possible that the Captain would ask for the two bottles

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of beer to be produced. He most certainly would ask for them if Miller attempted to wriggle out of the charge.

Still, he reasoned, Miller was almost certain to admit the offence when he, the First Lieutenant, formally charged him in a few minutes' time—and such an admission, made in front of the Cox'n, would make his conviction a mere formality when he appeared before the Captain. No, the beer didn't really matter, fortunately. The First Lieutenant winced slightly as he imagined what the Captain's reaction would be to the news that beer confiscated from an A.B. had been consumed by his officers.

He rose to his feet. Yes, justice would be done—his coil of two-inch rope would be paid for with two good-conduct stripes. His spirits rising, he turned towards the door and, pausing only to cast a final venomous glance at the now cowed and silent officers, headed towards the quarter-deck and First Lieutenant's Defaulters.

A.B. Miller—Attention! Off Cap—did commit an act to the prejudice of good order and Naval Discipline in that he did smuggle aboard two bottles of beer.

"Well, Miller," said the First Lieutenant, "have you anything to say?"

"Yes, sir," replied the unhappy Miller. "I'm afraid it was all a mistake—I thought I was bringing aboard two empty bottles. I put ships in them," he added helpfully. "If there was beer in the two I had, I must have put the wrong ones in my pocket by mistake. Are you sure there was beer in them, sir?" he asked, almost as if he was repeating a carefully rehearsed lesson.

For a moment the First Lieutenant stared at him, open-mouthed; and then such a look of fury contorted his face that Miller took a hasty step backwards—telling himself once again that he had been a fool to take Bloggs's advice, he should have realized the First Lieutenant would not swallow such a manifestly weak excuse. There was a pregnant silence while the First Lieutenant fought for self-control, and Miller cursed the absent Bloggs.

Then an amazed Miller was staring at the retreating back of the First Lieutenant and trying to convince himself—that the rage-choked words he had just heard were in sober fact: "Case Dismissed."

★ ★ ★

ARGOSY FOR H.M. FORCES

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY, why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

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Some likes coffee, some likes tea . . .

The Tea! The Tea!
Refreshing Tea.
The green, the fresh, the ever free
From all impurity.
I may remark that I'll be bound
Full shillings six was this the pound—
Full shillings six was this the pound.
I'm on for tea—I'm on for tea!
For the savour sweet that doth belong
To the curly leaf of the rough Souchong,
Is like nectar to me—nectar to me—nectar to me.
Let others delight in their eau de vie
What matter, what matter, I'm for tea.

H. J. Byron, *1834-1884*

Poor Comfort

The other mishap was connected with the solemn moment when Gladstone was ready for his tea. To all who knew the Prime Minister, this was not a matter which could be treated lightly. Gladstone's tea must be of precisely the correct consistency and must be presented to him at precisely the correct moment. Jeanie, aware of this, had given her housekeeper—appropriately named Mrs. Comfort—minute instructions when and how to prepare this important beverage, and particularly not to omit the Orange Pekoe which was to give it just the right flavour. What was her dismay to see Gladstone take the specially prepared cup, make an appalling grimace, and push it away from him in disgust. It was not till afterwards she discovered that Mrs. Comfort, in an excess of zeal, had emptied the entire packet of Orange Pekoe into the Prime Minister's select teapot.

A. M. W. Stirling, *Victorian Sidelights*

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Cheap Round

You that delight in Wit and Mirth,
And long to hear such News,
As comes from all Parts of the Earth,
Dutch, Danes, and Tirks, and Jews,
I'le send yee to a Rendezvous,
Where it is smoaking new;
Go hear it at a Coffee-house,
It cannot but be true.

Here Men do talk of every Thing,
With large and liberal Lungs,
Like Women at a Gossiping,
With double tyre of Tongues;
They'l give a Broad-side presently,
Soon as you are in view,
With Stories that you'l wonder at,
Which they will swear are true.

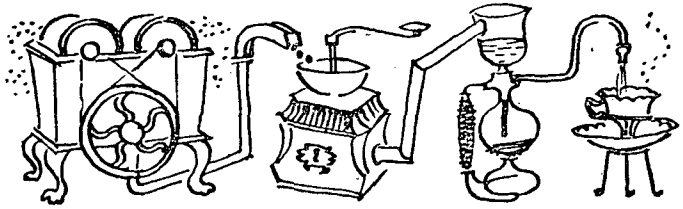
The Drinking there of Chockolat,
Can make a Fool of Sophie:
'Tis thought the Turkish Mahomet
Was first Inspir'd with Coffee,
By which his Powers did Over flow
The Land of Palestine:
Then let us to the Coffee-house go,
'Tis cheaper farr than Wine.

News from the Coffee House, 1667

Egg to her Tea

Mrs. Sarah Guppy of Bristol in 1812 was granted a patent for a teapot with a wire basket for boiling eggs suspended in its upper part. An ingenious American designed in 1863 a two-handled, two-spouted teapot to accommodate simultaneously those who liked their tea strong and those who liked it weak.

GERVAS HUXLEY, *Talking of Tea*



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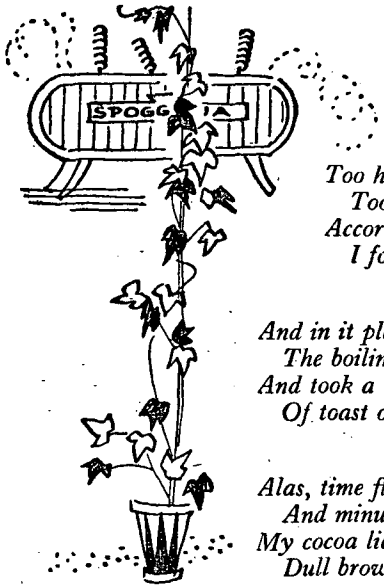
Hot Chocolate—

One of the earliest records about chocolate appears in the memoirs of one of Cortez's soldiers, who was fortunate enough to be present at a feast of Montezuma's.

" They brought in the several sorts of fruits, which they had in their Country, but they eat a very little of them, & that but leasurely, or at intervals: they brought some in cups of fine gold, with a certain drink made of the Cacoa itself, which they said was effectual to provoke lustful desires towards women, in which we admired nothing more, than that they brought in alone fifty great jars made of good Cacoa, with its froth, & that they drank it, the women serving them with a great deal of respect; & when Montezuma did eat, several Indians stood by him, which gave thanks, & others, which sang to him and danced before him, Montezuma being much given to pleasure: & he commanded the reliques of his feast to be given away, & the jars of Cacoa."

IRIS BROOKE, *Pleasures of the Past*



—Or Cold

It seems an age
Since from the pot
It bubbled, beige
And burning hot—

Too hot to be
Too quickly quaffed.
Accordingly,
I found a draught

And in it placed
The boiling brew
And took a taste
Of toast or two.

Alas, time flies
And minutes chill;
My cocoa lies
Dull brown and still.

JOHN UPDIKE,
Lament, for Cocoa

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WILD FLOWER

She breathed in its scent
sweet and sharp, a little earthy

BY JOHN WYNDHAM

NOT Miss Frayne. Not Phyllida Frayne.

Let others jerk awake to an alarm, scramble from bed, scrub away the clinging patina of sleep with a face-flannel, hunt out the day's clothes, watch the percolator impatiently, urge the toast to pop up more quickly. Let them chew briskly, swallow gulpily, and hurry, arms and legs reciprocating briskly, on their ways. Let these automata, with batteries regenerated, respond with spry efficiency to the insistent eye of the new day's sun, and let them greet the morning with resolution in heel and toe, a high-tensile gleam in the eye, and set off to make their new deals, new conquests . . .

But not Phyllida Frayne.

For today is part of yesterday. And yesterday and today are parts of being alive. And being alive is not just an affair of the days going clonk-clonk-clonk like the pendulum of a grandfather clock: being alive is something continuous that does not repeat, something that one should be aware of all the time, sleeping and waking . . .

It may not last much longer.

There is no savour in hurry, so Miss Frayne did not hurry; she did not jerk or bounce into the beginning of her day. About dawn she started to drift from dream through half dream to day-dream, and lay unmoving, listening to the birds, watching the sky lighten, becoming aware of the day as it became aware of itself.

For more than an hour she lay hovering this and that side of the misty edge of sleep. Sometimes the sounds in her ears were real birds singing, sometimes they were remembered voices speaking. She enjoyed them both, smiling in her half sleep.

By the time the day began to win her certainly from the night, the birds were almost silent. They had done with the greeting, and started on the business of looking for food. She was quite abruptly aware that the world was almost noiseless.

There was an alarming feeling of unreality. She held her

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breath to listen for some reassuring sound. Supposing it had all stopped now—as it might do one day?

Perhaps even at this moment there were in some parts of the world great columns of smoke writhing upwards in medusan coils, swelling out at the top into cerebral convolutions that pulsed with a kind of sub-life, marking the beginning of the silence that meant the end of everything.

For years now, when she was off her guard, those pillars of smoke had been likely to start up in her mind. She hated and feared them. They were the triumphant symbol of Science.

Science was perhaps wonderful but, for Miss Frayne, it was a wonder of the left hand. Science was the enemy of the world that lived and breathed; it was a crystalline formation on the harsh naked rock of brain; insensitive, barren, yet actively a threat, an alien threat that she feared as un-understandingly as an animal fears fire. Science, the great antibiotic.

So Phyllida listened unhappily.

A bird called, and was answered. That was not enough. She went on listening for more reassurance. In the farmyard several fields away, a tractor coughed, stuttered, and then ran more steadily, warming up.

She relaxed, relieved to be sure that the world was still alive. Then she faintly frowned her ungrateful contempt for the tractor, and pushed it out of her consciousness. It, too, was a manifestation of Science, and unwelcome.

She withdrew among her thoughts. She resurrected stored moments and magical glimpses, and remembered golden words. She landscaped her own Arcady which knew no Science.

The tractor throbbed more briskly as it trundled out of the yard, the sound of it diminished to a purr as it crossed the fields, unheard by Phyllida.

There was plenty of time. Enough to take the field pathway to school, and not to hurry over it.

The sun was climbing, a medallion pinned on a deepening blue cloak. Later on the day would be hot, but now it was fresh, with a touch like a cool, white-fingered hand. Refractive gems still trembled on the leaves and stalks. Beads from the shaken grass ran down her legs, showered on the white canvas shoes, fell like kisses on her feet.

Cows, coming out from the sheds with their udders relieved, but still slow and patient, stared at her with incurious curiosity, and then turned away to tear the grass, and munch in thoughtless rumination.

A lark, high up, trilled to mislead her from its nest. A young

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blackbird, looking puffy and overfed, eyed her cautiously from the hedge. A light draught of summer wind blew through her cotton frock, caressing her with cobweb fingers.

Then there was a muttering in the sky, then a roaring that rumbled back and forth in the vault, then a shrieking over her head, a battering at the ears and the senses, not to be shut out. The present, assaulting her, bawling un-ignorably, frighteningly through its jet-mouths; Science on the wing.

Phyllida put her hands to her ears and rocked her head. The outrage hurtled close above, sound-waves clashing together, buffeting, and reeling back.

It passed, and she uncovered her ears again. With tears in her eyes she shook her fist at the fleeing shriek of the jets and all they represented, while the air still shuddered about her.

The cows continued to graze. How comfortable to be a cow. Neither expecting nor regretting, having no sense of guilt nor need for it. Making no distinctions between the desirable and undesirable works of men; able to flick them aside like flies, with the swish of a tow-ended tail.

The shriek and the rumble died in the distance. The shattered scene began to reintegrate behind it, still for a while bloom-brushed and bruised, but slowly healing.

One day there would be too much bruising, too much to recover from.

" Intimations of mortality," said Miss Frayne to herself. " So many little deaths before the big one. How silly I am to suffer. Why should I feel all these pangs of guilt for other people? I am not responsible for this—I am not even much afraid, for myself. Why do I have to be so hurt by fear for all and everything? "

A thrush sang in the spinney beyond the hedge. She paused to listen. Unguent, sweet notes.

She walked on, becoming aware again of the silk-fringed zephyrs on her cheeks, the sun on her arms, the dew on her feet.

As Phyllida opened the door the hive-murmur beyond sank into silence.

The rows of pink-cheeked faces, framed in long hair, short hair, plaits, some of it morning-tidy, some of it already waywardly awry, were all turned towards her. The bright eyes were all fixed on her face. " Good morning, Miss Frayne," they all said in unison, and silence fell as completely as before.

She could feel the suppressed expectation in the air as they watched her. There was something she must respond to. She looked for it. Her glance went round the familiar room until it reached her desk. There it stopped, where a small glass vase held a single flower.

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The rows of eyes switched from her to the desk, and then back again. She walked slowly across and sat down in her chair, her gaze never leaving the flower.

It was something she had never seen before; she was quite unable to classify it, and she looked at it for a long time.

It was more complex than the simpler field flowers, yet not sophisticated. The colours were clear, but not primaries. The shape was comely, but without garden-bred formality. The ground-colour of the petals was a pale pink, flushing a little at the over-rolled edges, paling to cream farther back. Then there was the flush-colour again, powder-stippled at first, then reticulated, then solid as it narrowed into the trumpet, but split by white spurs of the centre veins.

There was just a suggestion of orchis about it, perhaps, but it was no kind of orchis she had ever seen, alive or pictured. The petal curves were sweet natural roundings, like limbs, or water cascading, or saplings bent in the wind. The texture was depthlessly soft.

Phyllida leaned closer, gazing into the velvet throat. Little crescent-shaped stamens faintly dusted with pollen trembled on green, hairlike stalks.

She caught the scent of it. A little sweetness, a little sharpness, a little earthiness, blended with a subtlety to make a perfumer's art vulgar and banal.

She breathed in the scent again, and looked into the flower, hypnotized, unable to take her eyes from it, loving it in its brave delicacy with a sweet, longing compassion.

She had forgotten the room, the eyes that watched her, everything but the flower itself. A fidgeting somewhere brought her back. She lifted her head, and looked unhurriedly along the rows of faces. "Thank you," she said. "It's a beautiful flower. What is it?"

No one knew.

"Who brought it?" Phyllida asked them.

A small, golden-headed child in the middle of the second row pinked a little. "I did, Miss Frayne."

"And you don't know what it is, Marielle?"

"No, Miss Frayne. I just found it, and I thought it was pretty, and I thought you'd like it," she explained, a trifle anxiously.

Phyllida looked back to the flower again. "I do like it, Marielle. It's lovely. It was very kind of you to think of bringing it for me."

She loitered over the flower a few seconds more, and then

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moved the vase decisively to the left of the desk. With an effort she turned her eyes away from it, back to the rows of faces.

" One day," she said, " I'll read you some William Blake—*To see a World in a Grain of Sand, And a Heaven in a Wild Flower* . . . But now we must get on, we've wasted too much time already. I want you to copy out what I write on the board, in your best handwriting."

She picked up the chalk and thought for a moment, looking at the flower. Then she went over to the blackboard, and wrote:

Their colours and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love . . .

" Marielle. Just a moment," Phyllida said. The child paused and turned back as the others streamed out of the room.

" Thank you very much for bringing it. Was it the only one? " Phyllida asked her.

" Oh no, Miss Frayne. There were three or four clumps of them."

" Where, Marielle? I'd like to get a root of it, if I can."

" On Mr. Hawkes's farm. In the top corner of the big field, where the aeroplane crashed," the child told her.

" Where the aeroplane crashed," Phyllida repeated.

" Yes, Miss Frayne."

Phyllida sat down slowly, staring at the flower. The child waited, and shifted from one foot to the other. " Please, may I go now, Miss Frayne? "

" Yes," said Phyllida, without looking up. " Yes, of course."

Feet scuttered out of the room.

Phyllida went on looking at the flower.

Where the aeroplane crashed . . . That had been almost a year ago—on a summer's evening when all the world was quietening and settling down for the night. *Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight, And all the air a solemn stillness holds.* Then the aeroplane, wheeling its droning flight, destroying the peace. It was a silver-paper cross up in the sky where the sunlight was still bright.

Phyllida looked up. She tried to ignore the noise and her prejudices, for the craft had, undeniably, a silver-moth beauty of its own. She watched it turn, the sunset glistering the undersides of the wings as it tilted. Then, suddenly, amid the silver there had been a flash of rose-red fire, and the silver moth ceased to exist. Pieces of glittering foil were spreading apart and falling. The largest piece trailed smoke above it, like a black funeral plume.

A great crack slapped at her ears.

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The pieces twisted and flashed in the sky as they came, some fast, some slower. The biggest of all seemed to be falling straight towards her. Perhaps she screamed. She threw herself on the ground, arms clutched over her head and ears, willing to sink herself into the earth itself.

There were interminable second-fractions of waiting while the silver wreckage came hurtling down the sky, and Phyllida and all the world about her held their breath.

The solid ground bounced under her; then came the crash, and the shrieking of metal.

Phyllida looked up, biting fearfully on her hand. She saw the silver body, a crumpled fish-shape, less than a hundred yards away, and in that moment petals of flame blossomed round it.

Something else fell close by.

She cringed close to the earth again.

Something in the main body blew up. Bits of metal whirred like pheasants over her, and plopped around.

Presently she risked raising her head again. The wreck was a cone of flame with black smoke above. She could feel the warmth on her face. She did not dare to stand up lest something else should explode and send jagged metal fragments slicing into her.

She was still there, clinging to the earth and crying, when the crash-parties arrived and found her.

Shock, they had said, shock and fright. They had treated her for that, and then sent her home.

She had cried for the destruction, for the fire and smoke, the noise and confusion of it; and, too, for the people who had died in it, for the wanton futility of it, for the harsh, mindless silliness of a world that did these things and kept on doing them and would keep on doing them until the last two subcritical masses were brought together for the last time.

They kept her in bed a few days, with instructions to rest and relax, but it was difficult to relax when things kept on going round and round in one's head.

" Oh God," she prayed, " won't You stop them? It isn't *their* world to do as they like with. It's Your world, and mine—the heart's world that they are destroying with their mind's world. Please God, while there is still time."

Phyllida remembered the prayer as she sat at her desk, looking at the beautiful flower.

They had put a fence round the place where the aeroplane had crashed, and set guards, too, to keep people away. Inside it, men in overall suits prowled and prowled, searching, listening, watching counters.

Cobalt was the trouble, they said. She had wondered how that

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could be. But it was not the artist's cobalt they wanted: the scientists had taken even the deep blue colour of the sea, and had done something deadly to that, too, it appeared. Though not altogether, not necessarily deadly, Miss Simpson who taught science at the High School had explained to her. The aeroplane had been carrying some radio-active cobalt intended for a hospital somewhere in the Middle East. In the crash, or perhaps in the first explosion, the lead box that kept it safe had been broken open. It was extremely dangerous, and had to be recovered.

"How? Dangerous?" Phyllida had wanted to know.

And Miss Simpson had told her something of the effects of gamma rays on living matter.

Several weeks had passed before the searching men were completely satisfied, and went away. They had left the fence, no longer guarded, simply as a mark to indicate the piece of ground that was not to be ploughed this season. The ground had been left free to grow what it would.

And out of the noise, the destruction, the fire, the deadly radiations, had sprung the lovely flower.

Phyllida went on looking at it for a long time in the silent room. Then she raised her eyes, and glanced along the rows of desks where the bright faces had been.

"I see," she said, to the emptiness and the unseen. "I am weak. I have had too little faith."

She had a disinclination to revisit the site of the crash alone. She asked Marielle to come with her on Saturday and show her where the flowers grew.

They climbed by a cool path through the woods, crossed a stile and the pasture beyond it. When they came to the enclosure, its fence already pushed flat in several places, they found a man within it. He wore a shirt and blue jeans, and was engaged in unslinging a heavy cylinder from his back.

He laid the thing carefully on the ground and pulled out a large spotted handkerchief to wipe his face and neck. He turned as they approached, and grinned amiably. Phyllida recognized him as the farmer's second son.

"Hot work carrying three or four gallons on your back this weather," he explained apologetically, wiping his arms so that the golden hairs stood up and glinted in the sunlight.

Phyllida looked at the ground. There were five or six small clumps of the flowers growing in the weeds and grass, one of them half crushed under the cylinder.

"Oh," said Marielle, in distress, "you've been killing them —killing the flowers. They're what we came for."

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"You can pick 'em, and welcome," he told her.

"But we wanted some roots, to grow them," Marielle told him woefully. She turned to Phyllida unhappily. "They're such pretty flowers, too."

"Pretty enough," agreed the man, looking down at them. "But there it is. Can't have this lot seeding all over the place, you see."

"You've poisoned them all—every one?" Marielle asked miserably.

The man nodded. "'Fraid they're done for now, for all they still look all right. 'F you'd've let me know . . . It's too late now. But they'll do you no harm to pick," he explained. "'Tisn't poison in the old way, you see. Something to do with hormones, whatever they are. Doesn't knock 'em out, as you might say, just sends 'em all wrong in the growing so they give up. Wonderful what the scientific chaps get hold of these days. Never know what they'll bring out next, do you?"

Phyllida and Marielle gathered little bunches of the doomed flowers. They still looked as delicately beautiful and still had their poignant scent. At the stile, Marielle stopped and stood looking sadly at her little bunch.

"They're so lovely," she said mournfully, with tears in her eyes.

Phyllida put an arm round her. "They are lovely," she agreed. "They're very lovely—and they've gone. But the important thing is that they came. That's the wonderful thing. There'll be some more—some day—somewhere . . ."

A jet came shrieking suddenly, close over the hilltop. Marielle put her hands over her ears. Phyllida stood watching the machine shrink among the scream and rumble of protesting air. She held up her little posy of flowers to the blast.

"This is your answer," she said. "This. You bullies, with your vast clubs of smoke—this is greater than all of you."

Marielle took her hands from her ears.

"I hate them—I hate them!" she said, her eyes on the vanishing speck.

"I hate them, too," agreed Phyllida. "But now I'm not afraid of them any more. I have found a remedy, an elixir, *It is a wine of virtuous powers; My mother made it of wild flowers.*"

★ ★ ★

BIG SHOT?

I never wanted to *be* a millionaire—I just wanted to live like one.

WALTER HAGEN

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FRIENDS OF THE PUBLIC

There was a fault somewhere—
they'd be back tomorrow to find it

BY H. A. MANHOOD

FOR many years we had no need of the telephone. And then the need arose. We anticipated, after conversation with friends and high officials, a year or two of waiting but, amazingly, through an error, as we discovered later, the installation was completed within a month.

Several teams of men were employed, with large vehicles in which they slept, played cards, fried eggs and bacon on pressure stoves, and did various jobs of work for themselves or their wives when weather, bad timing, or lack of instructions prevented outside labour. Small one-man vans rested beside or darted constantly about the larger ones like carefree pups, and sometimes large private cars would appear and merry, dressy men from town would make impressive play with briefcases, and inquire if all was going to plan before continuing their trip through the lush countryside.

In fine weather cooking was done on large well-tended fires, buckets of tea simmering blackly through the day. Clothes were also washed and hung to dry, and music came soothingly from a portable radio, accompanied quite often by a harmonica or the beat of a stick on metal. All in all, as you see, a pleasant, homey atmosphere was established.

One of the first teams to arrive lopped branches from overhanging trees with a bill-shaped saw on a strong metal long-arm. Men sawed up and down patiently and presently a branch crashed down, leaving an ugly splintered fang beneath the cut. The brushwood was trimmed off and thrown aside and the solid log carried to the lorry, where it was sawn into neat logs and sacked, all ready for disposal on the homeward journey.

Foolishly, I suppose, I pointed out that the timber was really mine; that we could at least share it. A white-faced little man with a carefully plastered quiff of sandy hair and a dead, homemade cigarette stuck to his lip, looked at me speculatively.

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" Can't help what you think, guvnor. We cut it down and we 'as to clear it up. Orders, y'see. Of course, we could come to an arrangement . . ."

But I didn't feel like paying so he went on sawing, the cigarette bobbing like a trapped worm, and me hoping the wood would soot their private chimneys so heavily that either a sweep or a fire engine would be necessary.

The next team was a little more friendly. A foreman explained, looking over my shoulder like a burglar weighing up the possibilities, that it had been decided to replace the single wires with a cored cable, just to make things more reliable for all of us. I said how very nice, and that I was sure we were most appreciative and he said not at all, for weren't they, after all, the friends of the public and anxious to serve, and weren't they barrels he could see in the shed in the distance, or were his poor, workworn eyes deceiving him?

Grudgingly I admitted the barrels and promised a little cider later on. He grinned, pleased that I'd seen the light, and went back to report to the team. They went to work with much laughing and whistling, determined to prove their brotherly worth.

Later in the morning a plump, crab-footed young man with a disconcerting twitch in one eye came sluggishly with a big iron kettle for water. I said there was rain or well water and showed him both. He looked down the well with obvious horror and shook his head. " You use it *raw*? "

I said yes, and offered to find the analyst's report. But he wanted only tap-water, the good piped stuff and, after consultation with his equally emphatic colleagues, went off in one of the little vans to find some.

From time to time odd people, high grade and low, came to look round and discuss the position of this and that. As I was usually drinking—I drank a lot through the month—I offered them drink too and our relations improved all the time. Man to man they asked very personal questions and in self-defence I did the same. I heard about wives and families, operations, mortgages, phobias, perils endured; was shown wads of horrible photographs and promised cuttings of remarkable plants.

One high official—he looked like an Italian opera-singer and drank quite as efficiently—confided in me at a later stage the reason for our speedy installation. It seemed we were sharing a line with Lord Wilkie, a newcomer to the district, as yet unknown to me. Someone in authority had thought he was a real lord and shoved everything into gear, but it turned out that Lord was Wilkie's Christian name. Lucky for us it was impossible to unscramble.

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Another simple soul, low grade, offered to buy the teak garden seats simply because there was a small disk on them indicating that they had been made from the timbers of a ship called the *Ganges*. His son was radio officer on a ship of the same name. I unscrewed all the disks and gave them to him and he said to let him know if ever we had trouble with our wireless. He'd get his son to look into it when he came on leave.

Repose was quite impossible amid the bustle. I became a little hoarse with all the talk, but they so obviously wanted me to know everything about them and the work that it would have been churlish to back away. Another team came with the telephone itself and a large bell to be fixed outside so that we might be warned if away up in the orchard.

Empty bottles, dozens of them, were deposited in conspicuous places and glowing testimonials offered as to the quality of the cider, but there were no serious casualties following the drinking of it. One man fell off the top of his lorry into a holly bush, but that was all. We found odd bits of rubber in our food and suffered intense pain from wire staples dropped about the floor.

And then, quite calmly one day, a big, baby-faced man—he'd been a commando in the war and killed thirty men, gentle as could be, as one of his mates informed me—came to me as I sourly picked ripening berries from the asparagus ferns. "You're through," he said and for a moment, as in a film, I thought I'd had it.

He inclined his head, inviting me to do the same, and faintly, like the notes of an alarmed bird, I could hear the ringing of the outside bell.

It was the faint ringing of this outside bell which brought yet another team in due course. Meanwhile we used the telephone quite happily, short and long distance too, although the exchange told us grumpily one day that as far as they were concerned we were not yet connected, on their books, or in use at all. This local exchange was a small, low-powered one so, since it lacked punch to ring the outside bell properly, it was decided to move the bell to a more favourable position.

There was more discussion, much more. While they were about it they would scrap the existing line in from the lane; rewire to hook on to an electricity pole. This would get rid of the sag, make a better job altogether. It only meant cutting the top out of an apple tree or two and ditching a few yards of wire.

So they started all over again. They cut out a ton or two of apple wood, fixed brackets and wire, pleased to show their skill. There was constant traffic from the lane, and ladders propped

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everywhere, an atmosphere of purposefulness that should have been comforting but somehow was not. Finally the foreman declared the job finished, all difficulties conquered. They would just check with the exchange; that would give me time to fill a few bottles they'd brought. They tried for an hour to check, looking glumly at each other and at me, suspecting sabotage.

There was a fault somewhere. They'd be back tomorrow to find it.

They did find it, two days afterwards. It was my fault too, entirely mine. When the work was done and the telephone working again they crowded gleefully around, the explanation in hand. A .22 bullet had pierced the new cable in the lane and they'd had to renew a length. Had I been shooting any squirrels?

I had, indeed! Well, well, it was happening all the time although it was usually twelve-bore pellets that caused the trouble. What sort of rifle was it? I showed them. Automatic too, very nice. We set up a target and they banged away very seriously in competition with each other. I gave them a squirrel tail each just for fun and we shook hands all round in perfect harmony.

The foreman said he'd ring through to report job finished. He went off whistling, but came back like a tired bull.

"No reply. Something's wrong."

There was, too. They'd put another bullet through the cable.

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STILL WATERS

" What a wonderful place, Bill!
I don't feel like moving "

BY E. HENLEY

IN the small Turisthytte on Lake Bygdin, Bill Norholt woke slowly and looked at his watch. It was nearly half past three, and the morning outside was clear and brilliant. He got up and, going to his wife's bed, gently drew the cover from her face. She opened her eyes.

" Hullo, darling. Is it time to get up? "

She murmured complainingly for a few minutes as he washed in cold water from the jug, but got out of bed as he started dressing.

Having eaten their cold breakfast, they shouldered their rucksacks, and followed the pathway up to Svartedal—the Black Valley—the entrance to which they could see above and ahead. Banking on fine weather, they had planned to walk through the mountains to another hut about twenty miles away, and as they set out, the world seemed quite deserted.

The far mountains, gleaming in the early sun, were mirrored serenely in the lake.

Though the air was cool, they were soon glowing with the uphill walk. The valley side was steep, and they went steadily in Indian file up the narrow path which slanted across it, leaning forward under the weight of the rucksacks. For some time neither spoke, and the only movements were the plodding of their feet and the swing of Jean's skirt. They climbed in silence until the lake lay far below, and the world of peaks, glaciers, and snow fields opened about them.

The well-trodden mountain path was marked by cairns all the way, so that they had no difficulty in following it, but suddenly Jean stopped, and coming up beside her, Bill saw that ahead the path ended abruptly where a small landslide had carried it away.

Sitting on a boulder, they spread out their map and considered the situation. There seemed to be a way up steeper rocks to one flank of the small truncated valley, but not being climbers, they looked for some other way. To have crossed the slide safely

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would have entailed descending some hundreds of feet and finding a new route among the scree and boulders.

From their map they saw that another small valley, running parallel with the Svartedal, offered an alternative and apparently shorter way, although no regular route was marked. From where they were sitting, access seemed easy enough, so they decided to try it, for if it proved impossible they could always return to the same hut.

They doubled back for a short distance, and struck off obliquely up the slope, going carefully among the large stones and blueberry bushes. As the ground became steeper they had to scramble up a jagged rock slope, with a small torrent roaring in a narrow chasm ahead.

Abruptly they found themselves between the high walls of the valley, picking their way along an old moraine. Small glacier streams came splashing down the cliff face opposite, and fanned out among the rocks on the shore of the lake. Once they heard the odd crumpling sound of falling rock.

Scrambling among the boulders was exhausting work. After a while they paused to rest and to enjoy the atmosphere of loneliness and grandeur. For a time they looked across the lake and up the valley, which formed a silent corridor between the cliffs; then Bill looked round, and studied the skyline behind them. A short way ahead the line was broken, where a dark cathedral-like peak rose on the far side of a wide declivity. A trickle of water glistened on the rocks below, and the slope there seemed more gentle.

"That's a fascinating spot," he said. "It looks like the entrance to a small cwm. I wonder whether there's still a glacier in it."

Jean eyed him dubiously. "You're not thinking of adding that to the programme, are you?" she asked.

He regarded it in silence for some minutes, before answering. "It might not be a bad idea. If we get up to the edge of the cwm, we can see what it's like from there, and also have a clearer view up the valley. It might be easier going up there, too, as we should be clear of this wretched moraine. We have food with us, so we needn't hurry. It doesn't matter if we don't go all the way today."

Jean agreed that it would be fun to explore, so, shouldering their packs, they made their way up towards the cwm. In these places, where there are no trees or anything of familiar size, distance is sometimes deceptive, and by the time they reached the entrance to the cwm they were tired and hot, and their packs weighed heavily on their shoulders. It lay farther back then they

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had expected, and was an almost perfect basin; sheltered by high ground on all sides, the small llyn in the centre lay undisturbed in the still air.

Walking down to the narrow beach, they followed it until they found a stream which ran into it, and putting down their packs, drank gratefully from the cold, running water. They took off their boots to ease their feet, and sat down to eat their lunch at the edge of the pool. Nothing stirred in the clear water.

"What a wonderfully peaceful place, Bill," Jean said, when they had finished. "I don't feel like moving."

"Let's not move on. We can spend the day here and go back to Bygdin, or bivouac here, if you like. I expect we could find some wood or something for a fire."

They looked about them, but around the dark water of that lake the earth was quite barren; there was no tree or bush, turf or grass, or any sign of vegetation—nothing. From the tops of the crags to the water's edge, among the sands, gravel, stones, and boulders, nothing grew.

"It's beautiful, Bill, but isn't it rather uncanny too?"

In that sheltered place they soon felt the heat of the sun, and the calm and the warmth filled them with a sense of lassitude, making them drowsy. So, abandoning their plans, they made pillows of their clothes, and lay there basking and dozing in the sun.

And at their feet, the pool waited.

For a long age the pool had lain there between the hills, among the barren sands and boulder clays, remnants of a dead glacier. Surrounded by high peaks and cliffs, the cwm was sheltered from the winds. Rains fell upon it, and snowflakes foundered in the pool's surface. Intermittent streams trickling down the gullies added infinitesimally year by year to the fine deposits at the bottom.

In summer the sun shone from the blue sky over the pool and, penetrating the clear water, the vibrant light caused minute stirrings among the lifeless clay. The incoming water brought with it weak salts from the weathered rocks, and the residue of dead things. The fine clay absorbing them, the pool remained clear, and was sweetened by the air.

Its waters were devoid of life, and it had long been as barren as a thousand other pools, until, at last, the lower surface of the pool was filled with invisible activity, sustained and growing; and the pool had being. The ice was a little thinner over the pool that winter.

The seasons came and went, and in an age the pool achieved a

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vast complexity, self-sorting, self-directing and, at last, aware . . .

When Bill opened his eyes, he saw Jean standing at the water's edge, tentatively immersing one toe. " You're not going in, are you, Jean? It must be like ice."

She waded in a few paces, and half turned towards him. " It isn't, darling. It's quite warm. Come on in."

" You're just saying that to get me in," he said.

" No, I'm not," she laughed and, diving in, struck out towards the centre, while Bill stood up and watched her, feeling the soft ground by the water give slightly under his feet.

And the pool, too, watched the pale shape swimming against the rippling blue light, and reasoned about this new thing.

Reaching the centre, she turned round and shouted, " Come in. It's lovely. It's really warm."

That was strange, he thought, as the water flowing into it had been icy; and the sand, too, was odd, for, though slightly yielding, it retained no footprints.

" How deep is it? " he called, wading into the water.

The surface closed over her head as she impelled herself downward with her hands, sinking until her toe touched the bottom.

At the firm contact of her foot, the mud of the pool clung briefly to it until, with a strong kick, she sent herself back to the surface. Self-organizing on the minutest scale, the pool recognized in that instant a thing in some ways like itself, made of the same elements, and warm with chemical activity, whose store of carbon and nitrogen must be almost as great as its own, but although the substance of the thing was familiar, it was possessed of some quite new faculty: its movement was controlled by shape, and that shape adapted to the movement—a masterpiece, about which more must be discovered.

" It's only eight feet deep," she called, as Bill came swimming towards her.

From the clay beneath her, blunt amoeboid fingers welled up slowly towards her moving feet.

" Did the bottom feel odd to you? " Bill asked as he approached.

" Yes, it did rather; warm and sticky, more like pitch than mud."

Here was a second moving thing, and the two were making sounds to one another. At first it thought that they were the same. It sent out invisible legions of dancing, curious molecules, which, flowing impalpably round their bodies, investigating, found that they were not. It was imperative to discover the reasons for these slight differences in chemistry and shape, and the thick round amorphous arms stretched higher through the

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water, until one of Jean's gently beating feet touched a soft groping tip.

She gave a startled kick. " Bill! Something touched my foot."

" Nonsense," he said and, turning over, peered down through the water, to see blurred dark things reaching up towards them.

Fear struck.

" *Swim!* " he yelled, and they went frantically for the bank.

The pool watched them retreating to the safety of the shallows. As they struggled ashore, the water round them thickened, and became syrupy, covering their bodies with a layer of slime, which clung to every hair and pore.

Bill was slightly ahead, and grasped Jean's arm to help her forwards, but the squashy lobes at the water's edge fouled her feet, and she fell headlong, gasping and screaming.

" Bill! Bill! "

The wet, glistening film covered both her body and his own and, kneeling in the water, he tried to claw away the dark glutinous mass which was dragging at her legs, but it slid through his fingers. He caught her under the armpits, and attempted to pull her up the beach, but his feet slipped in the slime. He saw to his horror that she was being drawn back into the water, her fingers digging frantically in the sand.

The slime on their skins was hardening to a tough membrane, while simultaneously spreading to envelop them completely. Bill could feel it creeping up his neck and through his hair, and saw, in terror, that Jean's mouth was covered. With one hand she was trying desperately to claw the stuff away.

Frantically he looked around, and among their things a few yards along the bank his sheath knife caught his eye.

The foul slime hampered him; but he struggled towards it. Snatching it up, he staggered back just as Jean's last strength seemed to give way. He hurled himself across her, and dragged her over on her back, kicking desperately to find purchase on the slippery ground; then, thrusting the sharp point of the knife between her lips, he ripped the membrane open.

The torn thing quivered for a moment; relaxed its grip, and receded gradually from her body, leaving her gasping on the sand. In a moment Bill too was free, his chest bleeding where he had slashed through the membrane. Jean looked up, dazed and frightened as, helping her to her feet, he guided her away from the lake.

Shaking and trembling, they leaned back against a boulder to regain their strength. He held her close to him, pressing his lips to her forehead and gently stroking her hair, while she lay with her face against his chest, struggling for composure.

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Alert for further danger, he watched the two strange things that had fallen from them lying thin and transparent like cast reptile skins by the water's edge, until the surface of the water stirred, and they were drawn back into the depths of the pool.

Bill put his arm around Jean, persuaded her to retreat still farther; then, leaving her, still pale and trembling with shock, he returned to recover their clothes, which were by the edge of the pool.

The clear water had become turbid with strange activity. The pool, which had been static for an age, was pondering these new phenomena of mobility and shape. It had shrunk from the bitter taste of steel, and its quarry had slipped away; but it still held their shapes.

Drawing back into the water, the skinlike casts billowed out, regaining form and volume; the torn edges grew slowly together, and the substance of the clays flowed into them, filling them, so that fingers distended, limbs straightened and started moving slowly in the water.

Bill touched Jean's hand. He felt that she was still trembling spasmodically.

" My darling," he said, " we'll go straight back to Bygdin, and stay there for a while until we get over this horrible business. " What this nightmare is, I don't know."

" Oh Bill, I feel sick. Oh my darling." She clutched at him, and clung to him like a frightened child as he tried to comfort her.

Suddenly his heart sank as he saw a disturbance in the water where something was moving towards the edge of the pool. A moment later two figures emerged, in shape a man and a woman, but translucent and glutinous in substance, like obscene quasi-human jellyfish. He gazed horrified as the flabby images of himself and his wife staggered quivering up the beach, and came floundering over the rocks towards them.

To them the parent pool had given half its substance, and through them in the water it had had experience of shape and movement; but as they left the pool, part of its consciousness went with them, part of itself, groping towards the beings that had given them form.

So the images approached, crawling, shaking, stumbling, while the hot sun beat down.

In hopeless terror Bill watched them, and gripped the handle of his knife; but as he watched, a change came over their pursuers.

The hot sun shone, and that of which the images were made sensed that its quarry possessed many faculties that it did not

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have, and felt its slender store of air and energy dwindle. Swathed by these membranes, the images were slowly suffocating. As the waters evaporated, the images lost their turbid strength, until they foundered, limp and crinkling, wilting like stranded jelly-fish.

Bill watched them, stupefied, as they drooped, fell, and withered. He saw the turgid fluid, amorphous and primeval, ooze back into the water. There it subsided, and percolated down to be reabsorbed into its mother clay.

And the pool, contemplating the sun, thought of what might be—while the two discarded husks lay on the stones.

★ ★ ★

SOLUTIONS to ALL ABOARD on page 17

1. *a. R. L. Stevenson; b. Charles Darwin; c. James Elroy Flecker; d. Phileas Fogg*
2. *i. train*
   ii. car or speedboat
   iii. Drake's ship
   iv. clipper ship
   v. plane
3. *Rudyard Kipling*
4. *A sheep, a cock, and a duck, from Versailles in* 1783. *The sheep and duck stood the voyage well; the cock was found to be very unwell, but this was discovered to be because it had been trodden on by the sheep.*
5. *E. B. White*
6. *The quotation should, of course, read, "Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay," and it is from Tennyson's Locksley Hall.*
7. *Baron Munchausen, reputed to have lived* 1720–97. *His apocryphal travels were described by Rudolph Erich Raspe,* 1785.

SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Baron of beef.* 7, *Herring.* 8, *Recital.* 10, *Real.* 11, *Logan.* 13, *King.* 15, *Dot.* 17, *Madrid.* 19, *Wright.* 20, *Carried.* 21, *Cobweb.* 23, *Degree.* 25, *Set.* 27, *Ruby.* 28, *Satan.* 29, *Stud.* 32, *Mansard.* 33, *Mallard.* 34, *Complicated.*
Down. 1, *Bernard.* 2, *Rail.* 3, *No good.* 4, *Format.* 5, *Each.* 6, *Fitting.* 7, *Harum-scarum.* 9, *Light-headed.* 12, *Gourmet.* 14, *Vices.* 16, *Order.* 18, *Dab.* 19, *Wed.* 22, *Bubonic.* 24, *Rutland.* 25, *Sandal.* 26, *Tarmac.* 30, *Farm.* 31, *Glut.*

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GOOBA MAKES GOOD

Carucha's pig gave him the brilliant idea

BY GEORGE SUMNER ALBEE

WAMPOLE BASFORD had inherited the block of stock that insured his being made chairman of the Basford Grass Mat Company, and this was just as well, for he never could have become chairman in any other way. Basford was the kind of man who whimpers, "I can't understand it," about his subordinates' ideas, plans, and projects, without ever suspecting the reason for his lack of comprehension to be his own stupidity. Other than this, nothing need be said about him except that he had the face and figure of a large white radish.

Fred Dewey knew he was in for a bad time the minute his secretary told him Basford wanted to see him. When Basford wanted to see you, you always had a bad time.

"Fred," said the chairman, "you're fifty years old this week, Personnel Division tells me."

"That's right, sir," replied Fred, eyeing Basford warily, as it was wise at all times to do. "I hadn't thought about it."

H. Wampole Basford looked tenderly at the painting on the wall of his office, a picture of an impossibly sweet little girl hugging an impossibly sweet little kitten.

"Fifty," he said, "is the best year of a man's life." He repeated this in a number of paraphrases. "And so," he asked at length, "what conclusion do we come to, Fred?"

Fred, perspiring, removed his rimless glasses and polished them. "I don't know, sir," he responded, and tucked up the shirt cuff that had the ink spot on it.

"We reach," said the chairman of Basford Grass Mats, "the conclusion that the man of fifty, with years of service behind him, deserves a breathing-space in which to take stock of himself, to check and double-check the direction his life has taken, to ponder on the good years still remaining to him, to think of himself rather than others. In short—"

"In short," said Fred, "I'm fired."

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"Did I ever tell you about the kitten I had when I was a little boy?" asked the chairman. "It wore a little bell."

"Just for the record," remarked Fred, "you're sixty-two."

"Well," said the chairman, "that's different. My brain is every bit as good today as it was when I was sixteen."

"Just about," said Fred, and left.

He took home with him his retirement bonus, a face that was as cheery as he could make it, and a book in a colourful dust jacket entitled *How to Retire on Absolutely Nothing*. At home he told his wife, Flora, what had happened.

Later, when the doctor had left and the sedative was taking hold, he sat on the bed beside her and leafed through the book.

"You see, dear," he said. "Islands, islands all over the Caribbean. Mean temperature, seventy-six degrees. No fuel to buy in the winter. Summer clothes. Food from the sea and the jungle. Gosh, it makes you want to start right off, doesn't it?"

"It makes me feel quite ill," said Flora, snivelling into her handkerchief. "Are you serious? Aren't you going to look for another job?"

"Grass mats are the only thing I know, Flora, and the only people the grass-mat industry hires today are college boys or radio comics. They want men of twenty with thirty years' experience as executives. Anyhow," said Fred, "if I found another job, it would mean putting up with another Basford. No, Flora, I'm through. I'm going"—he poked a finger at the book—"to Gooba."

Flora's jaw resumed its usual appearance, which was that of a bulldozer blade. "If you must, you must," she said. "I'll just get you a nice warm drink before you go to bed."

She put into the drink the remainder of the sedative the doctor had left for her. When Fred woke, at three the following afternoon, she was gone. A note in her handwriting said, *I have taken the money in the joint account, your retirement bonus, and the savings bonds, and the house is in my name. But I want to be fair. I am leaving you the Christmas-club contributions and the car.*

In his 1946 sedan with the loose bumper, Fred reached Miami in four pleasant days. There he sold the car and caught the island-hopping plane to Tobago. At Tobago he took passage on a blackened schooner, the *Solomon's Lily*.

Captain Herman Ginsberg, the owner of the schooner, wore oily dungarees, gold teeth, and a yachting cap that just managed to cover his bald spot. "Gooba?" he asked. "What do you want to go to Gooba for?"

Fred showed him page 137 of *How to Retire on Absolutely*

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Nothing, which said that the southern shore of Gooba was the seat of a delightful colony of retired professional people who swam in the turquoise lagoon, fished for wahoos, played bridge and chess, ate superb local beefsteak at thirty cents a pound, and drank rum that cost forty cents for an imperial quart.

" Must be new," said Ginsberg, scratching a match on his toes to light a cigar. He had not worn shoes since the day of the Dempsey-Firpo fight, he said.

Two days out, they dropped anchor off Gooba and rowed ashore in the dinghy.

" I don't see no colony," said Captain Ginsberg.

" It's here somewhere," replied Fred. " I see a path."

" I'll wait while you make sure."

" No, you run along," said Fred. " Just give me a hand with my cases, and thanks for everything."

After he had climbed the central volcanic cone and perceived that there was no colony anywhere, the thought came to him that the world was a sizeable place into which busy editors seldom ventured. Evidently the reason the book was such a seller was that its author had visited none of the places he described so deliciously. And by this time the schooner was hull-down over the horizon.

But there came cracklings and crashings in the forest, which consisted largely of rubbery almond trees and tall flamboyants, and he found himself surrounded by a crowd of undersized brown men, women, and children. All of them were clothed alike, in white trousers stencilled on the back with the word *Navy*.

He relaxed as he saw that the strangers were sighing, and shaking their heads. Never, not even in Flora's family, had he seen so many mournful faces.

" Ay! Es muy triste," said the headman. Fred recalled enough of his school Spanish to recognize " This is very sad." And in the ensuing conversation—a halting one, due to his poor Spanish and the fact that the Goobans padded theirs with bits of English, French, and Dutch—he made out that they were tremendously sorry for anybody who had the hard luck to land on their remote, unloved island. A few actually wept as they led him down the mountain to their village beside a cove.

The village was hidden away at the foot of an overhanging cliff. The two hundred or so houses were simple affairs: corner posts wrapped round with sheets of palm fibre, thatched overhead with palm fronds. In front of nearly every house, wearing pretty leather harnesses, slept pet pigs.

" Oh, meester, you will not like it here. You will never stay; nunca, nunca," said the headman—or, more accurately, the mayor.

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" Well, now, don't feel so badly," Fred comforted him. " Maybe I shall. We'll see."

He was installed in the largest, cleanest house, outside which a slim waterfall hung down the cliff like a white egret plume. In five minutes women in a cavalcade were bringing him pawpaws and mangoes on flat reed trays. Two of them were told off to cook and clean for him, which appeared to delight them.

And later that day he ate crayfish with tomato-and-onion sauce, red turtle broiled over charcoal, tender roast sucking pig with rice, and, for dessert, sun-ripened pineapple sprinkled with grated coconut and raw sugar. He was served a light, dry rice wine with the meal. Afterwards he and the mayor split a bottle of caña, a brandy distilled from sugar-cane that tasted not unlike a new rye whisky.

" You like? " asked the mayor, hoping against hope.

" Pretty good," said Fred sincerely. " Darned good."

" You will stay maybe? "

" Maybe."

The mayor called a name, Elena, and a girl stepped out of the sad-visaged crowd gathered around the bamboo verandah. She was about seventeen with an orange blossom in her black hair, and her Navy underwear did little to conceal her exquisite beauty.

" Elena will be your wife. She will sleep in your house."

" Really, Mr. Mayor, you don't have to go to all this trouble," protested Fred. " Anyhow, I have a wife in my own country."

Sensing his rejection, the girl burst into wild tears.

" Now she is unhappier than she was," said the mayor, " because she is thinking she is ugly. She will kill herself under the waterfall."

" Nonsense. You mustn't let her think of such a thing."

" I cannot stop her," said the mayor regretfully. " This younger generation pays no attention to me."

" But she mustn't do that! " exclaimed Fred. " Oh, all right. Tell her she can stay. She can sleep in the back room. In public I'll call her señora."

The first month passed in what seemed to be a sunset or two. With his adoring if sad-faced friends, Fred swam in the sea, speared fish, collected oysters and spiny lobsters, took long naps in the middle of the day, ate, and drank. In a lackadaisical way he explored the rusting, bottomless destroyer the Navy had managed to ram into the coral two miles north of the village, source of Gooba's white drawers.

At night, under the stars, he strolled the black-sand beach with Elena, who was teaching him Spanish, among other things.

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Life's only drawback was the Goobans' lugubrious expressions.

" Mr. Mayor," he asked one day, " what in the world is wrong with everybody? There's no singing, no dancing. Nobody laughs, nobody even gets drunk. Why are you so unhappy? "

" Because there is nothing to do," replied the mayor.

" But, good heavens, man," protested Fred, " this is paradise! People go fishing, they swim, they eat well, they make love day and night—what more do they want? "

" Work," replied the mayor. " Some of us have gone out in ships to Cuba and Jamaica. In those places everybody works so hard that it is a wonderful pleasure to rest at night; a pleasure that makes them drink and sing and dance. Here the bananas and the plantains, the fruta bombas, and the mangoes fall on our heads. A man can cut enough cane in an hour to boil a year's supply of sugar. The rice replants itself like grass. Little pigs are born faster than we can eat them. We want work."

" If you had work, you would be happy? "

" Oh, sí! Oh, yes, meester! "

" I'll think about it," promised Fred.

Thinking, in Gooba's ever-perfect climate, was a matter about which there was no hurry. Eventually, however, Fred gathered the villagers together and led them to the wrecked destroyer.

" Here," he said, " is a year's work. We're going to take every blessed thing out of this ship and carry it to the village. The women and children will carry the light things along the beach. The men will float the heavy machinery on rafts. Whatever is too heavy we'll take apart, writing numbers on each piece and making a picture of the way they are fitted together. Then we'll reassemble the pieces when we get them home. Now, vaya."

The results were unbelievable. The Goobans behaved like children in an amusement park. They started work and refused to leave off, lighting the wreck at night with flares. The singing began on the first day, and that did not stop either. Every last bit of the destroyer that was movable went to the village, and every piece was proudly exhibited to Fred before it commenced its journey.

The salvaging did not take a year, but only three months. By then everything was neatly stacked in a warehouse a hundred yards square, put up by a crew of eager carpenters. The warehouse became something of an administrative problem in itself. So many people wanted to hammer in nails that Fred had to issue tickets. And, looking at the mass of salvage, Fred recalled that he had once paid taxes and that they had been steep. No wonder! From a single small warship, he had a million dollars' worth of material, perhaps more.

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The *Solomon's Lily* dropped anchor in the cove a month later. Rowed by his picked crew in pale-blue singlets, Fred escorted Captain Ginsberg ashore.

"I been worrying about you, Mr. Dewey," said Ginsberg. "Glad to see you're doing all right. Well, I'll just pick up some fresh water. I guess these little guys ain't got nothing to trade."

He changed his mind when he saw the warehouse. Fred and the mayor let him load a few tons of stuff that was of no earthly use on the island and, in return, the trader put ashore bright cotton prints for the women and, for the men, knives, safety razors, lighters for their home-made cigars, and a box of earrings.

"Ah meester," said the mayor, grieving, "now you will go. I have watched you, mi amigo. While there was work you were happy, like us. But now the work is done."

"Why, sure he will!" cried Captain Ginsberg heartily. "Plenty of room in the old tub for you, Mr. Dewey!"

The mayor sobbed in a dignified way.

"Well, you see," Fred told the captain, "there's no place I want to go. And these folks are pretty unhappy. They kind of look to me to keep them cheered up. Thanks just the same."

The schooner weighed anchor with Ginsberg promising to return every few months. The village held its breath until the mast disappeared over the indigo horizon like the last flick of a gull's wing. That night there were ten gorgeous girls on Fred's bamboo verandah, clothed in cotton prints from the hips down and wearing in their dark hair ginger blossoms and orchids.

"Elena puts on airs and we are angry with her," they murmured softly. "We wish to be your wives, also, meester, and show you our gratitude because you are staying with us."

"Now, now, niñas," said Fred. "You know my house is too small."

"Our brothers will build you a big house, with a room in it for each of us."

"I don't want a big house," he explained. "And I certainly don't want a house with a pretty girl in every room. Do you think I'm loco?"

"Then we will all die beneath the waterfall," they vowed, weeping.

"Now, we can't have anything like that!" cried Fred, vexed. "Oh, dear me! All right. Each girl can live in my house, and shave me and curl my hair, for one month. But then she must move out without complaining and let another girl move in. Now are you happy?"

"Oh, muy generoso!" they shrilled, clapping their small hands. "Sí, sí!"

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But if the girls were happy, they were the only Goobans who were. Once again the village was moping.

"Tell me, Mr. Mayor," said Fred, "your Gooba men who've been away to other islands—what were the things they liked best there, other than work?"

"The lights," said the mayor, "and the cinemas and the dance halls."

Thoughtfully, Fred stroked his chin. "I wonder if we could," he murmured. "Well, it'll keep us busy for a while."

In the log book of the destroyer, in which the salvage job and the warehouse stood as Projects 1 and 2, he entered Project 3, the Gooba Hydroelectric Light and Power Company. He knew nothing about electricity, but, fortunately, the authors of the Navy handbooks for electricians had assumed that nobody knew anything about anything.

Under Fred's direction a crew of volunteers ran a three-inch steel pipe up the cliff, tapping the pool that fed the waterfall. The piped water drove a turbine, which in turn drove the generator from the destroyer. Again and again the workmen in the assembly crew got shocks that knocked them flat, but they regarded these as highly amusing. The royal palms made excellent poles for the three-phase feeder lines and there was plenty of wire. At the end of two months every house in the village had 110-volt current and at least one electric bulb.

In his own house Fred installed a refrigerator, a washing-machine, and the destroyer's radio set. Radio handbooks enabled him to get a small stand-by short-wave receiver working and, tuning this to a Havana station that broadcast boleros and mambos day and night, he relayed the music on the destroyer's public-address system to loud speakers spaced at intervals through the village. The music was Project 4.

Next, sending boys up palm trees to stretch a more lofty antenna, he cleaned the big receiver and transmitter with torpedo alcohol and, thanks to the radio operator's handbook, presently had it functioning. "Hullo, Miami. Hullo, Miami," he spoke into the microphone. "This is the Beautiful Isle of Gooba, Goo."

He was operating on the wrong frequency, but the Miami ship-to-shore station answered anyhow, courteously agreeing to put telegrams on the land lines for him and let him pay when and as he found the opportunity. The first message he sent, addressed to the house he had once thought of as his own, was: FLORA DEAR AM COMFORTABLY SETTLED ON BEAUTIFUL GOOBA PLEASE JOIN. The second was an order for rubber-wheeled roller-skates, to be

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shipped by way of Tobago and the *Solomon's Lily*, so that the children could use the dance hall as a skating-rink in the daytime.

Dreamland, the dance hall, was Project 6. Fred made it large. Coloured electric bulbs, the destroyer's battle-station lamps, kept the atmosphere properly dim and romantic. The floor was of mahogany planking honed smooth with coral bricks and given such a high wax polish by hundreds of willing hands that walking across it was hazardous. The destroyer's juke box occupied one corner blinking its hideous colours, which the Goobans thought far prettier than their sunsets.

Project 6-A was the Ice-Cream-Soda Bar. Its grand gala opening was an exciting social event of the season. Fred's waitresses, two pretty girls in pert caps, mistakenly connected a tank of welding oxygen to the barrel of spring water instead of a tank of carbonic-acid gas, with the result that the first sodas exploded with loud bangs. The Goobans were thrilled. For twenty-four hours, until Fred uncovered the error, you were nobody at all on the island unless your face was spattered with chocolate syrup and bits of glass.

Project 7 was the Toledo Drive-In Cinema. The drive-in offered special facilities, including janitor service for water-buffalo carts.

Project 8 was the Gooba Street Department. Charming as the random layout of the village was, walking in a spiral to visit the home of a friend was bothersome. Fred's project crew lifted the houses by their corner posts and replanted them on wide streets laid at right angles. The streets were then bedded with crushed white coral. A boiler was filled with water to make it heavy enough, and dragged back and forth by cheering men and boys, rolling the coral flat. Every street was planted with a border of poinsettias.

Project 9 was the Gooba Water-Supply Company. Pipes brought water from the hydroelectric plant's overflow basin and one of the destroyer's pumps maintained the water pressure at forty pounds, which could be quickly boosted in case of fire. The women did not often use the new taps in their kitchens, since the waterfall was the village's gossip centre and they still preferred to go there with their pitchers, but the running water was popular with the pigs and youngsters. A great deal of tooth-brushing went on, pigs and children sharing brushes in the friendliest fashion.

Project 10 was Fleet Protection. Gooba's fishermen put to sea only on calm days, but as a sudden storm might scatter them, Fred had the boats painted yellow with zinc-chromate paint for high visibility and their bows marked with large black numerals.

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Under the rear thwarts went cans of water and vegetable juices, life belts and iron rations.

But with the completion of Project 10 he ran out of ideas. The mayor was patient with him. Grateful for past favours, everybody else was patient too. But Fred could not help observing the covert, wistful glances that followed him; nor could he help hearing the sighs. Attendance fell off at Dreamland. The one-thousandth screening of a film entitled *Boys and Girls Together*, at the Toledo, played to a scattered house. One night he heard Carucha, his guest of the month, weeping on her pallet.

" Mr. Mayor," said Fred, " I can't tell you how sorry I am. I just can't seem to think of anything else. Shall we move the houses back where they were, just for something to do? "

" Ay, no. Then what would become of the water pipes? " demanded the mayor, in anguish. He had a flush toilet in his home, and his family revered it. The children kept angel-fish in it.

" What we need is an industry—steady work. Well," said Fred, with a dejected shrug, " it's time for me to walk Carucha's pig."

And then and there, as he took hold of the pig's plaited leash, it came to him. He thought of the fishing-boats' stout painters, of the sturdy ropes that had been attached to the heavy street roller, of the rope ladders the hydroelectric crew used in scaling the cliff.

" Grass mats! " he cried in triumph. " We have hundreds of acres of grass in Gooba! The best I ever saw! Every kid knows how to make rope. We'll put up a rope walk and a tying-shed! "

He led the mayor to the warehouse and pointed out the rope mats there that had once lain on the destroyer's decks.

" Are they to sleep on, meester? "

" They're for all sort of things," explained Fred. " There's a prickly kind people in the United States put down outside their front doors to keep mud from getting tracked into their houses. There's matting that comes in long strips, called runners, to lay on top of carpeting on rainy days. There are pads that are used in unloading trucks, especially beer trucks. There are these open-work mats for ships. They're used for all sorts of things."

" We will build a mat factory," said the mayor. " Oh meester, you are our good friend."

They chose a handsome site where the operators would be able to watch the changing tints of the sea. There they put up a long, narrow, wall-less building with mahogany work-tables, a lunch bar, and a day nursery.

Within a week the operators were improving on Fred's simple

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patterns, tying flower and fruit and fish designs into their mats and tinting some of their grass with red and yellow dyes they got by boiling shells. With people waiting in line for a turn at the tables, production was fantastically high. The men built a storage shed and it began to fill at an alarming rate. Never had Fred been so thankful to see the *Solomon's Lily* come into the cove.

"Captain Ginsberg," he said, "we've put up a grass-mat factory and we're turning the darned things out so fast we don't know what to do with them. Can you help us?"

Ginsberg peered into the shed and whistled between his gold teeth. "Just the ones you got here'd fill my boat. Say, they're pretty, ain't they? But, Mr. Dewey, what would the people on these islands use doormats for?"

"How about the cities? How about San Juan?"

"Maybe I can unload a few dozen for you. But you've got thousands."

"We don't want any profit," said Fred, pleading. "Sell 'em for a dime. Sell 'em for a nickel. Just get rid of them, so we can go on making more."

"A nickel?"

"Sure."

"For a nickel," said Ginsberg, "I could sell myself. O.K. Start your boys loading."

And that was how the problem was solved. Four times a year the *Solomon's Lily* came for a load of mats. Captain Ginsberg, chuckling slyly, was mysterious about his market, but Fred asked no questions, for the island was happy now. This time for keeps. Never again would Gooba run out of work.

So one month followed another, each like a month in a fairy tale, no longer than a day. The sun rose in splendour and set in glory. The pelicans waltzed over the wavelets: the little sardines leapt out of the water to prove they had invented chromium plate.

Fred was at the factory, it so happened, the morning the two-engine amphibian landed on the cove. "Everybody take the day off!" he shouted.

Usually he met with protests when he declared a holiday, especially from the radical wing in the union, which was agitating for three shifts and no vacations, but this time there was no complaint.

No Gooban had ever seen a plane at close range. Jabbering, so excited that half of the women forgot to put on their fancy skirts, everybody raced for the beach, where Fred's special oarsmen had the lifeboat ready.

The pilot and an elderly man in a white linen suit were lowering

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an inflated rubber raft to the water as Fred pulled alongside the plane.

" Never mind," he heard the elderly passenger say. " I'll ride in with this coloured character. He seems to be the chief."

He realized that he was the coloured character. " Happy to give you a lift," he called. " Welcome to Gooba." Then, as he spoke, it occurred to him that there could be only one man in the world who so strongly resembled a white radish. " Gosh," he said, " if it isn't Mr. Basford! "

" Why, hullo there, Freddy," said an astonished H. Wampole Basford, letting himself down into the lifeboat. " I was just passing by, so I thought I'd drop in."

This preposterous statement was so characteristic of his one-time employer that Fred could find no answer to it. He gave the young pilot a hand, the cox'n blew his conch shell, the oars sliced the water as one, and they sped towards the beach with half of the populace swimming around them.

Several hours later, exhausted by the tour of inspection on which Fred, with his springy step, had enthusiastically taken him, H. Wampole Basford sat on the bamboo verandah and sipped a caña-and-lime highball.

" Fred," he said, " I was sorry to hear about Flora."

" Is she—"

" You haven't heard? "

" I've sent her three or four radiograms," said Fred. " She didn't answer them."

H. Wampole Basford clucked his tongue in what would have been, in a person capable of feeling it, sympathy. " No, she's not dead," he said, " but she might as well be. Flora got a job as receptionist at Don Wicke's mortuary. She and Don fell in love and she divorced you for desertion and married him."

It was Fred's turn to cluck. " Maybe it's for the best," he replied. " There's a girl here named Elena who wants to marry me."

" A girl? Did you say a girl? "

" A woman." On Gooba, Fred reflected, girls became women at the age of eleven. Elena, at twenty-one, was quite elderly.

There was silence.

Basford set down his glass, and when he spoke again, it was in a different tone.

" I never would have believed," he said, " that you were such a vengeful, vindictive man."

" Vindictive? " asked Fred. " If Flora divorces me, it seems to me—"

" I'm not talking about Flora now. I'm talking about me.

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Me and the others at the plant that will be out in the cold as a result of this crazy, murderous plan of yours to destroy us!"

"What are you talking about?" asked Fred, bewildered.

"Oh, don't play innocent, you snake in the grass!" snapped Basford angrily. "I'm here to appeal to your loyalty to old friends, your decency, your sense of fair play!"

He appeared to have not the least notion that, coming from his lips, these were strange words. "All right; you've got us licked. We're going to have to shut down. Are you satisfied? What are your terms?"

Fred sought a glimmer. "You can't mean our mats? What harm can our Gooba Grass mats do to the Basford Grass Mat Company? Captain Ginsberg—he's a trader with a schooner—just dumps them for us, that's all."

"I'll say he does!" exclaimed Basford. "He dumps them in Baltimore for a flat price of a dollar apiece f.o.b.! I know all about your partner Ginsberg—I put detectives onto him. I know all about your duplicate bank accounts in Baltimore. I know, too, you're each pulling twenty thousand a year out of this wildcat operation!"

"Why," exclaimed Fred appreciatively, "what a nice thing for Ginsberg to do!"

"Don't talk like a hypocrite!" shouted Basford, in a fury. "Do you know how much it costs me to make a doormat?"

"Two dollars and forty-seven cents."

"Not these days. Three dollars and eighty-two cents! How can we compete with you? We can't. So what do you want, Dewey?"

Fred rocked thoughtfully. "Well, well," he murmured, remembering many things.

"What do you want?" roared the older man.

"I'm thinking," said Fred, lighting a fragrant Gooba cigar. "Let's see. I'll want to be chairman of the board; I think I'd like that. Gooba will be our main plant; I'll make my headquarters here. The Basford plant will be our branch in the States, with permission to use our Gooba Grass brand if its work comes up to our standard."

He held out the cigar and looked at it. It did not tremble a bit.

"I'll accept that," grated H. Wampole Basford. "Anything else?"

"Well, one minor thing. How old are you, Basford?"

"Sixty-seven."

"H'm—that's a little old for a chairman of the company," remarked Fred judicially. "Basford, sixty-seven is the best year in a man's life. The man of sixty-seven, with years of service

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behind him, deserves a breathing-space in which to take stock of himself, to check and double-check the direction his life has taken, to ponder on the good years still remaining to him, to think of himself rather than others. In short, Basford, you're fired."

Imps waving victory banners the colour of blood danced around a blazing bonfire in his mind. But only for a moment; for he was not H. Wampole Basford, he was Fred Dewey. He reached out and patted the frightened old man's shoulder under its rumpled white linen.

"At the first meeting of the board, we'll appoint you honorary consultant," he concluded gently. "Now, would you and the pilot care to stay to dinner? We're having chilled stone crab this evening, with mayonnaise."

"A human being with seven and six has to be with you"

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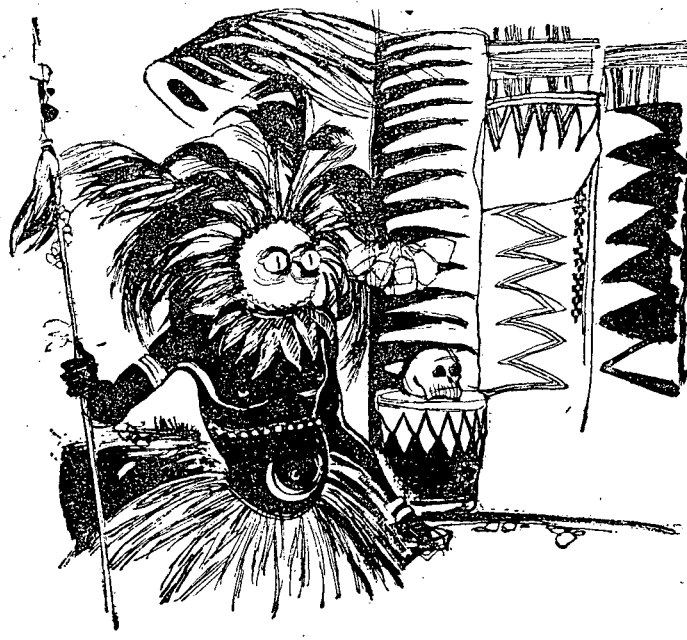

Since the night of the storm I had known that Helen loved me. I think Henry Seaman knew—and enjoyed it. It amused him to see my torture—and he did not torture me alone. He had brought Helen back from England as his bride; young, lovely, ash-blonde. Henry had painted the African Congo, and our cattle farm in the jungle, in romantic terms. The savage reality was a crude shock, as was her bitter discovery of Henry's sadistic temperament. When I had told Colley (the Rev. Franklin Collinson, our only neighbour) that Henry had married, he said, "It will mean big changes, Jim." I knew he meant Marie-Thérèse, Henry's half-caste housekeeper. Her father had sold her to Henry: it was useful to have someone in the white man's house and in his bed.

So far I had resisted Marie-Thérèse's overtures. All my desire was for Helen—but now, in my torture that which was aroused by one woman was spent upon the other.

Our very existence was charged with tension: in the jungle, silent leopard-men prowled on their murderous ways.

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MAMBA

BY STUART CLOETE

IN his hut the Chief was looking at his hats. There was the bead-covered skull-cap ornamented with the two cow horns, rather like a viking's helmet, covered, horns and all, with small bright coloured beads—wampum—that he wore when seeing white men in his official capacity. He wasn't terribly attached to this hat. It was the other that he liked, which few white men had seen. It was made of woven string net to which were fastened dozens of bright red polly feathers, and round the edge, so that they dangled over his face and neck, were pierced leopard fangs.

The witch-doctor was with him, looking taller and more shrivelled than ever.

"Well, we got rain last season," he said. "Plenty of rain. No one discovered anything and I have some strong medicine left."

The Chief took snuff and put his hat back on the cross-beams of the hut.

"We had rain," he said. "You have medicine. There was the stranger and we have got rid of one goat without hair, that gave neither milk nor flesh." He meant a useless member of the tribe. "And the white man has discovered nothing, which proves how good your medicine is. The noise of its virtue goes abroad. I have had offers."

"They will pay much?"

"They will pay very highly." The Chief offered his snuffbox. It was made of an old cartridge case. The witch-doctor took some

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from the little bone spoon that was attached to the stopper. He sniffed appreciatively.

"You shall have more," he said.

A child came in. "Lord," he said, "one of them has gone in truck." Everything the white man did was reported.

Henry Seaman had said, "You'd better take the truck up to the store tomorrow. There's some stuff there for us."

And I had been only too pleased to get away—away from it all for a couple of days.

Things were not going at all well with me. I wanted to be with Helen but avoided her, which hurt her feelings. Marie-Thérèse had suddenly become jealous of the attention I paid to Helen. I thought that a couple of days shoving the old truck along the bush tracks, and a night with Senhor Pedro da Costa at the Beach might cheer me up. If I bought a couple of new pagnes for Marie-Thérèse it would keep her quiet for a bit. Cloths and beads and brooches—those things were the language she talked.

The drive to the Beach was a cross between a chore and a joy-ride, and made the whole trip an escape of thirty hours or so. An escape from worry, from embarrassment, from fear, from love. As I piloted that damn truck, which rolled like a ship in the rough seas of the track, I had time to reflect, to sort something out, to plan, to rearrange my feelings into some sort of order, without anyone impinging on me at a critical moment.

First, what did I want? I wanted Helen. But also I didn't want her, partly because of the trouble there'd be. I was afraid of that. And partly because I didn't want to get tied up with her, or with anyone else for that matter, at present. I knew that if I did get mixed up with her it would be bad.

She had all the qualities that appealed to both the worst and the best in me. She was, or would be, I was sure, sexually maddening, with her hot, soft flesh; her slim, boneless body fitted close against my own. It had not happened yet but that's the way I knew it would be. I could feel her against me in my mind. On the other hand, she appealed to all that was chivalrous in me, to my protective side, to the latent St. George of the boy that I had once been. The only thing she did not do was to make any sense whatsoever. There was nothing rational about it. Common sense had no application here.

So much for Helen. I had not advanced very much there. Marie-Thérèse came next. She was simpler. A black gold-digger, who acted like a bitch. But there was something on her mind. There was some hidden motive. Like most evolved Africans and half-castes, she was a split personality. Presumably she hated white men but, being part white, she could not be assimilated by her mother's people. So she was still more split. She was divided, physically in her blood, culturally in her beliefs, in her hopes and desires. Forced by circumstance to emulate what she hated. She hated Helen but copied her. She hated her

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tribal relations but was tied to them by the umbilical cord of her upbringing, by her vestigial belief in witchcraft and the never-to-be-forgotten fears implanted in her at her initiation.

Marie-Thérèse had refused to go home when Helen came. She had hung around in the background of the establishment and then, by a series of clever moves, had become Helen's personal maid. Not, I was sure, out of any desire to serve her. But to learn from her, and to remain in the central core of the situation which was developing, in order to be there when something broke.

This was really the only thing that was absolutely clear. There had, from the beginning, been no possibility of a *status quo*. The two girls had evolved a conversational pattern, because it is evidently necessary for women to talk even if they do not like each other and cannot understand each other. They each talked their own language, softly chattering and nodding their heads and waving their hands like two birds perched on a twig. Marie-Thérèse stole things from Helen and copied her. Helen watched and hoped to learn some ancient African secret from the black girl.

Henry was the most interesting person of the lot of us. He had power, brains. In some ways he was almost a genius. Utterly unscrupulous, utterly cold, driven by forces beyond my comprehension, he was, I was sure, under his false good-fellowship, his high ringing laugh that left his blue eyes as cold as ice, a man driven by devils, a man possessed. A man who tortured not only other people but himself, impaling himself on the pin of his own curiosity, making himself suffer; for ever creating new and horrible situations to see what he would do, to see how he would wriggle out of the trap he had set for himself.

In a way I liked and admired him. In another way I feared and loathed him. There was that afternoon when I had seen Henry pounce like a great cat on a lizard at the bottom of the garden. I had not shown myself but had waited to see what he would do. He put it into a small tin box that he brought from his pocket. Giving him time to get back, I went down to where he had been. One of the aloes was in flower. A tall scarlet candelabrum on which a sunbird was clinging, sucking the nectar from its blooms with a long curved beak. It was a lovely picture—the tiny black, ruby-throated bird, the flower stem that rose out of its sculptured spiky leaves.

There were lots of lizards about there, though. I had never really noticed them before. I tried to catch one but missed. That Henry could catch them was just another proof of his deft quickness. But on the ground beside my knee was a lizard's tail. It was still twitching with a life of its own.

If I had been thinking less of myself I might have realized something was up when there were so many more insects and lizards in the house than was usual, particularly as they were always in the sitting-room or in Henry and Helen's bedroom. It had taken me some time to persuade Helen that the almost transparent beige-coloured geckos were nice friendly little things that lived on

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mosquitoes, moths, and flies. I told her that all lizards in Africa were harmless, but she really had a terror of them.

One thing that should have opened my eyes was that a number of these lizards that we found in the house, the ordinary, shiny, rather snaky kind such as we have at home, had no tails. Why should the lizards in the house have no tails? Why, in fact, should these lizards, which are not like geckos or the big agama house lizards, be in the house at all? They like rocks and stones. And certainly, although it did not strike me at the time, a big chameleon, the most terrifying-looking, but the slowest and most harmless of all reptiles, will never come into a house on its own. But one had.

Now I had discovered the secret, the explanation. This was another of Henry's little jokes.

I had not gone straight back to the house. I did not want him to know I had been out. So I went to the stables and drifted round the kraals to look at the sick bull.

There was no law against a man scaring his wife. There was no evidence even that he did. I was the only witness. I might have chanced a row. But if I got sacked it would be still worse for Helen. While I was there I thought that perhaps I could temper the wind in a way.

The obvious course was to get to hell out of it. But that was impossible. Where would I get another job supposing Henry would let me go? Besides, I was in too deep.

Our life continued, superficially normal. Each of us living our own life, in the circle of our own thoughts, and upon each impinged the circles of the others. Helen's life was cut into by mine and by Henry's. Mine by Helen's and Henry's. Henry's by Helen's and mine. Marie-Thérèse's cut by mine, by Henry's, by Helen's, and the life of her tribe. All at different levels, all penetrating to different depths.

I was part of the pattern. Already woven into it and beyond extraction.

I pulled up the truck in the partial shade of a big thorn. I put a cushion near the trunk and sat down to have my lunch. I had my shotgun on the ground beside me. I had a bottle of warm beer, some bread, and a tin of corned beef. What more could a man want? Lots maybe, but when you're young and hungry a meal is a meal. There was a certain interest in this brand of corned beef. The tin had a label with a negro's head on it and there had been some difficulty in explaining to our simple savages that this was not a picture of the product.

For the moment I was happy. My worries were fifty miles behind me. I was alone in Africa. In this wonderful unchanged continent. Actually, I was not quite alone. Emile, my boy, was with me. But one does not count natives, any more than one counts one's own shadow. He was a good boy who served me well. He was saving his wages to buy a wife. I was the means of his future prosperity. When he had her, and stopped working for me, I would be forgotten. I had made no dent on his personality.

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He had had his food. Some manioc bread wrapped in a banana leaf tied with strips of bark, and sour milk in an old yellow gourd. Now he slept the sleep of the anaesthetized, slept as Africans sleep. Like the dead. When I wanted him I'd have to prod him awake. Then he'd come to slowly and smile. His thick lips would open, his white teeth appear, his plum-coloured mouth open in a yawn, and he'd be back from the world of dreams which he so often confused with reality. A good boy, Emile. Brave, faithful, utterly dependable. As charming and as stupid as they come.

In this white world in which he now moved like a zombie, Emile was happy enough. We loved each other. We thought each other mad, but interesting. I had never struck him. I had never even spoken roughly to him. I suppose I regarded him as a pet. I think he regarded me as an idiot who would unquestionably come to a bad end without his constant intervention.

He lay on his belly in the shadow of a bush. He was dressed in a pair of my old khaki shorts, which were held up by a leather belt I had given to him. Fastened to it was a key to the padlock of his box, and a soft-steel trade pocket-knife that he kept as sharp as a razor. His woolly head was pillowed on his arms. His feet were towards me, their thick, pale, ash-grey soles cracked and patterned like those of an elephant.

"Emile!" I shouted, and prodded him with my toe. He rolled over on his back like a big black tickled cat, smiled into my eyes, and opened his big purple mouth in a yawn. I was reassured. I had one friend. While he served me. Till he forgot me.

It was time to go. I had come to the conclusion that there was no conclusion. I must take things as they came. Live my life as I found it.

Back in the truck, I pressed the self-starter. We were off again.

At the store, Pedro filled up my glass with sweet, strong wine. He filled his own. We drank in silence.

"It is always a pleasure to see you, and to hear your news. I suppose you have heard of the leopard-men?" he said.

"I heard some nonsense," I said.

"Ah ha," he said. "You knew the girl at the mission died? She need not have. It was her will."

I said, "Yes, Colley told me. But that was some time ago."

"A good man, that Colley. There are not many such men who do not render their pupils pregnant. But one never hears such things said of the good Colley. I hear everything here," he said. "This is a listening-post in the forest and I, too, am an ancient combatant."

He always claimed this brotherhood of arms. He had served in the Portuguese Expeditionary Force in France, but had spent most of his time either in Paris, or in hospital after his amorous engagements in the city of light.

"You hear everything and report nothing," I said.

"Report? Who am I to report? I am not a Belgian. I am

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not an official, a functionary. My God, imagine it—me a functionary! That is one thing I am not . . ."

"Leopard-men," I said, trying to dismount him from his hobby. I wanted to hear what he had to say about the leopard-men. To me they were still a myth.

"Well, the rains came, did they not?"

"Of course," I said. "They always come."

"But they were very late last year?"

"Yes, they were late," I said.

"First there was the mission girl."

I said, "Yes."

He said, "But they did not get her. The good Colley buried her in his little graveyard."

"Yes, she died," I said.

He said, "Pouf! What is death?" He waved his hand. "It is all round us. That is not what they wanted. They wanted the parts and they got them."

"Well?" I said.

He said, "There was a stranger. He passed here. He should have come back. He never returned and then there was rain. Splendid rains. Soft, continuous rains."

"Well?" I said again.

"That man was killed," he said. "His blood was taken. Parts of his body. Strong medicine was made. It is the talk of the country, and beyond it. Not only that it rained but that the rain was so beautiful, so soft, of such long duration. Such rain, they say, has not been known since the white man came."

"So?" I said.

"So," he said. "So now there is a demand for the medicine that made this so beautiful rain. More people will die. You will see. And there is something else you do not know. To be efficacious and please the gods, these parts, this blood must be taken while the victim lives." Then he said, "How long have you been here?"

"Nearly two years," I said, "but I have been in other places."

"Other places?" he said. "What are they unless they are in the forest? And the forest, my boy, runs from Sierra Leone to Angola and across Africa to Tanganyika. The forest is the evil corset that confines the belly of Africa. We—you and I—white men like us"—I thought he flattered himself—"will never conquer the forest or learn its mysteries. I could tell you things," he said, "things I have seen . . . Leopard-men, baboon-men, crocodile-men, lion-men, cannibals. When I was a boy I found a hut in which human legs were being smoked like hams. I, who am still a young and virile man, have seen these things. I will tell you something else. When a man has once eaten human flesh he gets a taste for it. Particularly here, where there is so little meat—only game, which is hard and dangerous to come by. The hands of a man or a gorilla, the feet of an elephant—these things are not forgotten."

I had not heard about this, and said so.

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" Oh ho," he said, " what do we white men know of the black? I trade. You raise cattle. That Colley, he saves souls and gives aspirins to the *pombé* drunkards who come to him with a headache. But Africa we cannot touch. I come nearer because I trade. I talk their language. I sleep with their women, so they talk to me; and their fathers and brothers talk, and I give them wine, which is against the law. But wine is the oil of the tongue. And they are not afraid of me. It is interesting," he said. " If you do not die it is most interesting to live in the Congo."

He said, " That is the black man's talent. Survival. That is why he is afraid of us with our education and improvements. We threaten his talent. Think," he said, " in five hundred years there may be no great cities left, with aeroplanes bombing them from the sky. But in five hundred years there will still be Africans in the forest, senhor. For in Africa we are outside time."

We were sitting on the stoep, or baraza, as they call it. Behind us was the store with its piled trade goods. Tinned foods, hoes, knives, three-legged iron cooking-pots, paints, oils, patent medicines, tobacco and cigarettes, matches, candles, cheese, lanterns, lantern glasses, spare mantles, stoves, adzes and bush picks, hammers, saws, and other tools. Blankets, mandolins, cups, combs, straps, sweets and candies, five-pound bags of salt, whistles, chairs, earrings. And the goods that Senhor Pedro traded them for. Stinking skins tied in bundles, beeswax melted into great cones, gums and copal, native weapons and shields that would find their way into the curiosity shops of Europe, elephant tusks and hippo teeth, a few leopard- and lionskins, bundles of civet- and wildcat-skins.

They all blended into one curious smell—a composite aroma of cheese, kerosene, badly cured hides, cheap trade perfume, and the smell of the African customers. It impregnated the place, and would remain there for years, even if the store were emptied. Haunting it, as if the ghosts of the goods that had passed through its doors refused to leave the premises where they had come together and consummated a marriage of western gadgetry and African raw materials—as if things too had souls.

Behind the store were its master's living-quarters, where his concubines and their varicoloured children swarmed, humming like bees. Between the two, the front shop and store-room and the disreputable back, came a sort of long parlour where he had his office, and in which, like a spider, he spun the webs of his commercial intrigues. It was here that, as a white man, he entertained European visitors who came by road or river.

In front of us as we sat on our deck-chairs, the Lukuquila rolled in slow, sullen, leaden flood towards the Congo, towards the sea, towards eternity. There was a certain interest in thinking of it, in thinking of each drop of water as sentient. Its one desire to join the sea, as a Christian longs for heaven. Fighting its way towards it, its wish to cease being a drop, as it had been when it fell from the skies. Wanting company, wanting wholeness, wanting majesty,

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wanting to join the other waters where, with them, it could show its power over men.

Without water we could not live. That is more particularly apparent in Africa than elsewhere, but still I had come to hate water. Hate the torrential showers, hate the spongy marshes where death lurked in the mangroves, hate the sullen rivers which, without warning, showed the teeth of their sudden rapids. There was always too much or too little water so you were constantly aware of it, either making dams to conserve it or repairing the damage after floods.

A piragua flashed by downstream, in the centre of the river. The sun caught the paddles of the naked men who drove it through the water. They shone like steel, as white as spears, tinged with the blood of the fading light. Upstream they kept near the shore where the current was less strong. But, going down, they rode its gallop with wild cries, like a man urging on a horse. Fragile as straws in the current, these great hollowed trees of wa-wa wood were manœuvred as delicately as feathers by their crews, who had travelled these waters from father to son for a thousand years. These men were fishermen, water men. It was said that farther up some had web feet. This I did not believe, but if I stayed here long enough I would believe that also.

Sometimes a hippo bull upset a canoe, sometimes one charged it, biting it in half with its great tushes. Sometimes, particularly if it was a small one manned by a woman alone, a crocodile would lever itself out of the water on to the bows and overturn it. Often women washing on the bank were taken. The crocodile leaves its prey to rot into softness, fastened beneath the roots of some tree that overhangs the water.

Sometimes I felt that this habit epitomized the white man's position in Africa. That he was submerged in its immensity, that he was rotting slowly and would eventually be devoured. Yet he could never get away. If he went away he returned. Africa held him in its grip, in its current, in the slow tide of its rhythm that got into his blood, changing its tempo as surely as it was changed by malaria, thinning it down, exciting it with fantastic nostalgias when he thought he had escaped.

But I was in a bad mood, depressed and tired, caught like a nut in the cracker of the present. I could see no future, no tomorrow.

As if he knew my mood, Pedro remained silent. Then we had dinner. More red sweet wine, small freshwater shrimps, and one of Pedro's palm-oil stews with pili-pili, fufu of mashed manioc, rice, and manioc leaves served green, like spinach. Tinned peaches with tinned cream. Coffee followed, and Portuguese brandy. Then, inevitably, came the dirty pictures. They were always served with the brandy. He even had some fresh ones, more revolting than the old. A new man, he said, a veritable genius, had taken them in Lisbon.

An evening with Senhor Pedro da Costa was quite an education. The morning after was always a headache. But he was a good

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host and with my morning coffee came a Portuguese version of a prairie oyster—a mixture, among other things, of raw eggs, sauce, brandy, and quinine. It is hard to imagine a more horrible or a more efficacious mixture.

Then I got down to business and loaded up our stores. Cattle feed, flour, bacon, dried fish from the Canary Islands and smoked caterpillars for the boys, some axeheads and bush picks, a roll of game riems—thongs cut from the skins of the wildebeest—two five-gallon drums of dip, and various other stores and groceries. Tea, coffee, a bag of sugar, toilet paper, tinned goods—corned beef, pork and beans, peas, and asparagus—two bags of stock salt, a small five-pound bag of table salt. Stock medicines and remedies, candles, cigarettes, rolls of tobacco for the boys, snuff—all the usual mixture of necessities and luxuries that are needed on a farm in the bush.

Then there was the mail. The business mail addressed to the manager, some personal letters for Henry. One for me from my long-suffering mother. Nothing for Helen—there never was anything for her. I picked out three cloths for Marie-Thérèse. The latest and most fashionable designs for, strange as it may seem, the ladies of Africa are very fashion-conscious, and will no more wear an old design than the women of London or New York would wear clothes that they consider out of date. One was dark red with a design of harps on it. Another was olive-green ornamented with red butterflies, and the third was yellow blotched with black leopard spots. God knows why I bought it. I suppose unconsciously I must have been thinking of the leopard-men.

The road back was exactly the same as the road to the Beach. By this I mean there were no distinguishing features, except the position of the sun, to indicate in which direction I was facing. A patch of bush, a tree, a forest section are not like a village, a farmhouse, or a church at home, which look different from different angles.

A man ought to know whether he is coming or going. I would later, as the sun went down, because then I would be driving into it instead of having it behind me. I do not know if I noticed this then, or much later when I thought about such things, and my life, which at that time had a kind of terrifying treadmill sameness, an endless circling about an emotional centre that was like the vortex of a maelstrom. I knew it was there but kept trying to look away. Trying to pretend it did not exist.

When we reached the tree where I had lunched on my way out I pulled up and lunched again. It looked just as it had looked before. I even found the empty corned-beef tin, which showed that no one had passed this way. The natives like tins. They fit twisted-wire handles to them and use them as cups. I again sat with my back to the tree. Again Emile lay on his belly under the bush. The picture was repeated in its entirety except that the truck faced in the reverse direction.

I took the mail out of the bag and examined it again. I would

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read my letter in a minute. I was in no hurry. My mother's letters were never enjoyable. She loved me too much. She thought too much of me. To her I could do no wrong. It would have been much better if she had disliked me, much easier if she had been ashamed of me. Much better if there had been no news of the house or garden, of how she was looking forward to my coming back. I had no intention of coming back. This time I had gone for good. I had been absorbed into the great family of family-less men. I fitted in nowhere. The war had unsettled me, but I do not think I would ever have been settled.

I opened the letter. It was like all the others. Filled with love, understanding, gentleness, hope, patience, beauty that gripped my heart and made my belly contract.

If I could have, I would have gone back. If I could have, I would have changed my nature. But it was too late now. If the company gave me a station of my own, a ranch or a plantation, that would be different. Then I'd have something to show. Now, as an assistant manager, what had I?

I put the letter in my pocket. I was not looking forward to answering it.

I looked at Henry's personal mail. There were six letters. Three at least were from women from the writing. Two from the same woman were written in a large, bold, sloping hand on pale mauve, perfumed paper. I sniffed the envelope. He must have had a good leave, I thought. Did she know about Helen? Did Helen know about her? I looked at the postmark—London S.W.1. Well, it was none of my business but one couldn't help thinking about such things.

Three natives came along the road towards me. One of them was carrying something. They stopped by Emile. He woke up. They greeted me. I replied.

"Where are you going?" I asked. I knew, of course. They were going to the store. They were standing by the truck on the far side of it. I strolled over. They had put a small buck on the ground by the front wheel. It looked up at me out of great brown eyes. It was not tied. Why did it not run away?

I touched it. It flinched from my hand but did not get up. I put my hand under it. Its legs were broken. I should have guessed at once, and would have, had my mind not been occupied with Henry's mail. They were taking it to Pedro. They had trapped it and then broken its legs so that it would live but could not escape. Had it been dead, it would have gone bad before they got to the store. The Africans are very logical, very practical. Pedro never hunted. He could not leave the store. But he liked a change from the local goats and sheep and always bought what game they brought him.

I said, "What do you want for it?"

They said, "A hundred francs."

I offered them ten, and they took it, laughing.

I told Emile to kill it. It gave a frightened kind of bleat as he

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bent back its head and severed its throat with his small, sharp knife. It lay on its side, its smashed legs twisted grotesquely, like a broken toy on the bare red ground of the road. Its blood ran out, dark and glutinous.

Emile dragged it to the truck. Henry would be pleased. He liked venison. At least its pain and terror were over now. The natives were arguing and laughing. When they had gone I asked Emile what they had said. I could not speak their local dialect.

Emile laughed. "Monsieur," he said, "they do not know whether to spend the money on beer or women." To that end the small buck's agony.

We set off again. I called that particular tree the halfway house. I always tried to stop there. Now it held another memory. I wondered what my mother would have thought. I wondered if I would have bothered to do anything about it if I had not just had a letter from her.

A year ago I certainly would have bought the buck, or shot it without buying it. But I had hardened, changed. It was rather strange to think of the letter. That it was my mother's hand stretched out over the sea that had made me act as I had. It was as if she, acting through Emile, had slit its soft brown throat. There was now a string that tied the dead buck bobbing about at the back of the truck to my mother in her garden at home.

Only here does one get such fancies, only here do sentiment and brutality, another word for reality, weave themselves into such patterns.

When I got back nothing was changed. Henry took his mail. Helen looked at him reading it with wide grey, wondering eyes. I knew she was thinking: Will I ever get a letter again? But who was there to write to her?

I said, "I got a letter, Helen." And something impelled me to give it to her.

"How lucky you are!" she said.

"Lucky?"

"To have a mother." Tears flooded her eyes. But she did not cry. They came the way water comes into a hole when you strike water, welling into it, finding its level, and remaining there.

"She must be very nice," Helen said.

"I'd like you to meet her," I said. Would I? Was that what I wanted? For the moment I did. And now, through my mother's letter, I had bound Helen to her. Another curious triangle, Mother, the buck, and Helen. Had I wanted this?

"I brought back a buck, Henry," I said. I did not tell him the story.

"Good!" he said.

I did not tell him I had bought it. It was not worth while. I'd never see the ten francs again. Not that I cared. But it would have been the same if it had been a hundred, or a thousand. I heard someone shouting.

"What's that?" I asked.

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" A bloody nigger," he said. " I caught him yesterday. He had killed a calf." Henry's face was suffused with blood, his small eyes blazed. Someone had touched his cattle. His love. My God, how he loved the stock! And the love was reciprocated, which was even odder. He could do anything with animals, although he did not work them much. He was too heavy to ride and left most of the stock work to me.

" I gave him a hiding," he said, " and shut him up in the store."

" He yelled all night," Helen said.

I knew where he had put him. A small building with barred windows and a heavy door that we sometimes used as a store, sometimes as a sick ward if one of the boys needed special attention, and sometimes as a prison if we had to hold someone till we could get them to the Chef de District.

" I'll take him in tomorrow," Henry said. " You had the truck today."

I said nothing.

" I hope he doesn't go on screaming," Helen said, putting her hands to her ears as if to cut off the noise.

Henry would be away two days. We would be alone. The tempo was increasing, the vortex approaching. I could feel it dragging—pulling at me. I got myself a whisky-and-soda.

I said, " Have one, Helen? "

" Yes, please," she said. She had begun drinking now. I poured one out for her and another for Henry.

We said nothing. The imprisoned man continued to yell like a maniac. Sometimes he screamed like a chimp, then he seemed to sob and gave a sort of choking cry. Henry got up and put on the gramophone. " Let him yell," he said.

Dinner was not a cheerful meal. Anything, even Pedro's sickening pornography, would have been an improvement on this music with its background of screaming. I could see that Helen was on the verge of hysteria.

Henry was smiling to himself. " That'll teach them," he said. " Teach them to touch my calves. Once that kind of thing begins . . ."

" They're meat-hungry," I said. " Meat-mad."

" Let them hunt," he said.

We all drank rather more than usual but in spite of it I slept badly. I woke several times. The yelling was really maddening. The man must be a maniac, stir-crazy.

I got up early and thought I'd go and look at the prisoner. He had quieted down now. There hadn't been a sound for some time. I remembered waking, hearing nothing, and thinking he must have exhausted himself and be asleep.

But it wasn't quite like that. When I got up to the store-room I saw the boys collected near it. Half a dozen of them. They looked excited, uneasy. They moved their feet up and down, restless as horses. When they saw me they came towards me. The

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capita, the boss boy, said, " Come, monsieur! " He took my arm, something he had never done before.

When we got near he pointed to the ground. It wasn't very light yet. I went close. He pulled me back. I looked more carefully. There was a thin black line that led from the bush to the store hut. It might have been drawn with a paintbrush. It ended at the door.

" My God! " I said. " Ants. Driver ants."

" *Fourmis*," he said.

And the man? What chance would a man have? It was getting light fast now. I went nearer to the black line. It was about three inches wide. A solid stream of ants was moving towards the store. It was guarded by the soldier ants. They were much bigger than the others, with enormous mandibles. They stood two deep, one on top of the other on the outside, like troops lining a street while the procession between them went on. How many were there? Millions, hundreds of millions. Nothing could resist them. I thought of the old story of the boy who cried wolf. If the native had not yelled at the beginning of his incarceration some notice might have been taken of him when he screamed in his torment.

We went up to the room and looked in at the window. There was no man. Only a skeleton. It was black with ants. It looked as if the bones wore a black, moving suit. They crawled into the eyes and nose sockets, into the cavity of the sagging jaws, in between the teeth and then on, over the remains and out of the window on the other side. They had finished. He was now only an obstruction to be crossed. A bridge of bone in their line of march. They looked like a black, extra wide typewriter ribbon being pulled slowly through the tiny building.

This was something that Helen must not know. I could see the marks of his fingers where he had torn at the hard clay of the whitewashed wall. There were great red streaks of blood where he had grabbed at it with broken nails.

And there was nothing we could do. Only wait till it was ended, till the last ant had gone. They had their line of march; to disturb them would only change it. It would not stop them.

But of course it could not be kept from Helen. The place was in an uproar, everything disorganized. The line of march must not be broken. As long as they were not disturbed they would go on and on and on until the great trek ended, till the rearguard reached what was now the front, till the last ant came and went.

But even if it had been possible I do not think Henry would have tried to protect his wife from this awful knowledge. To him it was nothing. It was just one of those things. One more event like any other. I think he was amused at her horror.

As for me, I felt very little personally. Only for her. The *I*, that would once have been horrified, was lost in my pain for Helen.

It went on night and day for three days. The line of march was followed by birds, black drongo-shrikes with forked tails, blue bee-eaters, small red hawks who struck like Cossacks, swiftly rising and

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falling lest they themselves become the prey, on the small animals and insects—the crickets and grasshoppers, spiders, mice, and snakes—which fled from the ants. Hovering, fluttering, diving, screaming, the birds rejoiced in the feast.

To the ants who had consumed him, two miles away in the forest now, the dead man had been nothing. Just meat. That he had moved was immaterial. For once on him they moved with him. The ants were invincible. Lions and leopards, elephants and snakes—all fled from them. And insects, the praying mantis —himself a terrible fellow—and the tarantula, the ants took and left empty, leaving only their outer shells, their skeletons. Fire was the only thing that could stop them. Ash, its residue, the only thing they feared. A fire would stop them. Ash deflect them. In a sense they were blind destroyers driven by hunger.

The dead African had not disappeared. He was still there. His bones were in a bag in the truck that Henry was driving to the Chef de District like a hearse. His flesh and blood and nerves moved, rustling on a million legs through the grass and fallen leaves of the forest.

The death of the African had had no effect on the boys or Marie-Thérèse except to give them a subject for conversation. Most of them would have liked to see him die. The division between amusement and horror for them was less wide than a human hair. Driver ants. Well, everyone knew about them. Everything that could run ran from them. Things that could not run were consumed.

What had happened was no surprise. It left them unmoved. But Marie-Thérèse, or Maigunda as her African relatives called her, took the opportunity of Henry's absence at the Chef de District's headquarters to visit her village. She was loath to go while he was there in case he wanted her back or decided to break open her room and throw out her things. But with him away she had come to a decision at last.

Her mind, part black, part white, had for a long time been divided between acceptance and revolt, between doing nothing and doing something. The tendency of the African is to do nothing, to wait for Africa, for the forces that govern his life—the forest and the river, and their gods—to operate, and then suddenly, unable to stand inaction any longer, to do something, anything. To make a sacrifice, to kill. But not necessarily his enemy. His mind is occupied with his enemy, but anyone else in his path will do. Their killing is symbolic. This was Marie-Thérèse's African nature, but it was overlaid with her father's blood, with the remnants of her European instruction at the convent, with reason. She felt the moment had come to act. This was her opportunity.

She did her hair with care, parting its fuzziness. She rubbed her body with the salad oil she got from the cook, put on her best rolled-gold earrings and her new leopard-spotted pagne.

In her heart there was a song and she stepped lightly on her

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bare feet down the path. First over the open veld, then through the savannah scrub, and finally into the darkness of the forest where the path was soft with the humus of fallen leaves, and so to the village. It was dusk when she got there. She would spend the night.

It seemed to her that she was looked at coldly. That the children ran from her, that the men turned their backs on her shining beauty, that the women left their cooking fires and went into their huts. She felt alone in the village. I have grown away from them, she thought. They are like animals. Like beasts. They are filled with envy.

She went to her mother's hut. It was like a big inverted bird's nest, blackened with the smoke of the fires that killed the mosquitoes, and some of the other less hardy parasites, and preserved the thatch by coating it with the tar of the woodsmoke.

Hardly had she squatted on her heels by the iron pot that was simmering in the red wood coals, when a young man came in. "You must come, Maigunda," he said.

"I must?" she said. "Who says so?"

"The old one."

"Ah," she said, "I was coming to see him anyway. I will come later."

"Now," he said.

"All right, now." She got up with one movement, uncoiling her body like a snake. She saw her mother's eyes shining like black agates in the tiny flame glow of the fire. She had not spoken. Neither when she came in nor when she left. She wondered why. The old one. The ancient one. The wise one. The doctor wanted her.

She followed her guide through the deserted village. To its outskirts where there was a compound of several huts linked together with hanging mats, and walls made of stone and clay. As she stepped through the narrow gateway she was seized on either side by two men, masked and dressed in suits of woven raffia. Over their eyes they wore tubes of wood that ended in white painted disks. They projected from their masks as the eyes of a snail project from its head. There was a ruff of raffia round their necks. A short, stiff ballet skirt of the same material went round their waists. They wore little iron ball rattles on their ankles.

These were the doctor's assistants. Those who fetched and held the boys when they were circumcised, who bound the victim of the sacrifice while their master wielded the knife. They were the ones who ran through the village at night, beating the women and children. The men who whirled the bullroarers. Terrifying men, who, when they put on their strange ceremonial suits, ceased to be men and became something more. Something in between men and gods and beasts Even if the village people knew the identity of the masked man, as soon as he was dressed he lost his individuality.

He became someone else, something else—the spirit of the forest,

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something no longer familiar or even human. These uniforms were ancient, handed down among the servants of the cult. They were sacred, masculine. Few women, if any, had ever seen them so closely. For women ran from these wielders of rods and power. Part of their function was to terrify women, to keep them subject to men. Few had seen them dressed in their finery—few who had had lived.

What had she done? She had wanted to see the doctor. To get something from him. She had money to pay for it stuck in her loincloth. The notes were soft, with the sweat of fear.

Someone invisible to her threw wood onto the fire. It burnt up brightly. She could see the compound clearly. The walls of the huts were hung with sacred objects—horned buck skulls, the skulls of goats, of crocodiles. Long dangling pythonskins, the skins of smaller snakes, the carapaces of tortoises, the skeleton of a big fish, dried white egrets dangling from extended wings. A festooned string of gin bottles strung by their necks caught up the light of the leaping fire. A human skull rested like an ornamental vase on a thick post in the centre of the compound, staring at her with black, empty eyes.

Then he came, the old one. He, too, was dressed in raffia, but his skirt was longer. The ruff round his neck stuck out more stiffly. His mask, with its tubular white painted eyes, was circular like those of the others, but it was surrounded by a great round frill—a sort of sun of tall feathers. He advanced towards her with a series of running jumps.

He looked enormous. His hands were raised above his head. They hardly showed in the darkness so that the pale woven arms of his suit seemed handless. More assistants came out of the darkness, surrounding her.

She was no longer held, but pinned by her fear to the spot on which she stood. A bullroarer was whirling. At its sound, every hut in the village would be closed as if against lions, hyenas, leopards—all the prowlers of the night were less feared. Food left cooking outside would burn in its pots. The fires would die as if killed by the sound, for no one would tend them.

Then he spoke.

"You have dared, Maigùnda, you have dared to don the coat of the sacred one, the spotted one. That is for men alone," he shouted. "Strip her! Strip this female thing, strip her to nakedness! Strip her so she will see that she is not a man! That she is only a woman. A womb that walks. A place in which men may plant their seed. What is woman," he shouted in a cracked voice, "but a thing, a carrier and a nourisher of seed? A field to be ploughed by men, to be hoed by men, to be cultivated by them."

Her fine pagne was torn from her. She revolved as they pulled it off for it was rolled round her. She stood naked in her loincloth.

"The loincloth, too," he said.

"The loincloth," the others shouted. "The loincloth!"

Now she stood naked. A black Eve surrounded by devils, by

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satyrs, by gods. She folded her hands in front of her in an act of modesty.

" Beat her! " the old man said.

They beat her with white, newly peeled wands. As they beat her she ran. She leapt the fire. She tried to hide in the darkest corners of the compound. She crouched like a whipped dog, howling with terror, her head bowed, her breasts against her thighs. But they beat her up. They beat her down again. There was nowhere they did not beat her. Her back, her buttocks, her legs, her belly, her thighs, her very breasts. Nothing was sacred to them. No part of her. Then, at an order, they stopped.

" Now you can go," he said. " Go back to your white masters —yellow whore that you are! "

One of the men picked up the notes that had fallen on the ground. " What is this? " he asked.

" It was for you," she sobbed. " I came to buy medicine. I have something else too." She looked for her loincloth and found it. From a little pocket sewn into it she took a small packet, wrapped in a rag, and opened it. " Here are some finger- and toenails, some hair, some blood."

The hair was long and golden in the lantern light. The nails red slivers like the tongues of snakes.

" So you want death. You want me to make death? " The old man laughed. It was a strange, cackling sound in the silence of the night, something that resembled the first part of a cock's crow and ended in a hyena's moaning laugh.

" Aai. I am the master of death, for death is easier to give than life, though I can give that too. Come," he said.

She tried to put on her loincloth. It was snatched away. He had her money, the little rag and its contents, in his hand. She followed him like a beaten dog; as naked as a dog without its collar. In the hut he lit a stable lantern with a match and hung it from one of the cross-beams. The weak light, dimmed by the smoky glass, illuminated his store of medicines. They were stored in parcels of raw hide, in horns, in boxes, in white man's bottles, in gourds; there were the mangy skins of every species of animal, tails of the elephant, the giraffe, and the sable. There were blown birds' eggs in strings, great ostrich eggs, chunks of stone, distorted roots, bundles of leaves and herbs. Hanging from a peg was a leopardskin, its headskin shaped as a mask, its forelegs sewn together into gloves.

" Sit," he said. He pointed to a stool carved in the form of a coiled snake. " So you wish to kill. Aai, I can kill for you. Slowly or fast, painlessly or with pain. I am the master of many deaths."

She said, " You will make a medicine? A strong one? "

" I have one here." He gave her a little horn stoppered with a plug of beeswax. " You will give it when the moon is full. And I, on that night, will make medicine here with what you have brought me." He gave his curious hyena laugh.

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"Now go," he said, "and be silent. You have seen nothing, no one. Should you say anything, you will die." He pulled off his mask and threw the leopardskin over his back. His face was hidden. She saw his eyes in the leopard's face. His arms were the forelegs of a leopard. He drew an iron rod out of a gourd. But it was not a rod. Its end was divided into sharp, shining spikes. He drove it whistling through the air with a downward stroke. "So women die," he said.

"*Amiotos*," she breathed. "Then it is true?"

"What is true?" he said.

"Leopard-men." She knew it was true. She could not imagine why she had spoken.

"There are only leopards, woman. The killers of the forest. The spotted ones. Go and forget." He pointed with the spiked claws to the door. His eyes glared at her through the eyeholes of the skin. In the yellow gloom of the lantern light he had ceased to be a man. He was a leopard.

She crept out and ran. She ran naked through the forest, along the path over the veld, pursued by phantoms. By trees that seemed to be dressed in raffia garments, as they stretched out their hands towards her, touching her with the fingers of their branches. Once she screamed in terror. In her hand was grasped the medicine horn.

It was like that—hot, wet with sweat, and trembling—that she ran into my arms. I was on the path beyond the garden when I heard someone running towards me. I stepped into the bamboos. As she came abreast of me I caught her. I had recognized her by the perfume, Helen's, that still clung to her, a strange yet familiar odour of scent, mixed with her sweat. She gasped and then clung to me. A naked woman, aroused with beating, and fear.

I had been driven out of the house by the devils of the night. The air of the thick, soft, warm night and the thoughts that were a torment to me. Thoughts of Helen alone in the house, with Henry away, and waiting for me. Because she was waiting, I could not go. This was the one thing I wanted to avoid. But it was sending me mad. I put my foot between Marie-Thérèse's legs and threw her down. For an instant she resisted. Fighting me with straining muscles. Then, in the darkness of the night, we mated like animals. Furiously, brutally. She giving herself in wild abandon, as if she hoped to rid herself of her memory of the last few hours by putting this act between the past and the future. As if she could pare the past away with the knife of her lust.

I was no better. I took in hatred what I could have had in love from Helen. Took what had driven me out into the night. In one dark instant we had gone back fifty thousand years. We were not man and woman but primitive elements. The male and female caught in their male- and femaleness. Caught as a tree-trunk is caught and throttled by a liana.

Then I felt her searching the ground with her hand.

"What have you lost?" I asked.

"My horn," she said.

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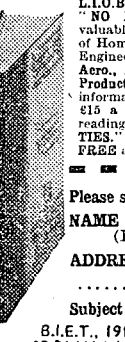

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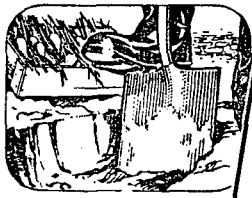

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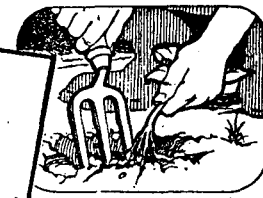
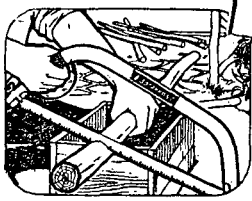
Beds to weed
Or holes to bore





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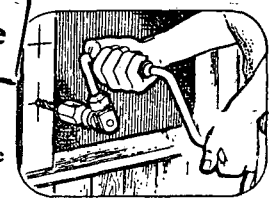

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I found it. " What's in it? " I said. I knew where it came from. I guessed. " Poison? " I asked.

" Of course," she spat.

" For Henry? " I said.

" For her," she said. " For her. She has spoilt everything."

" You shall not have it," I said.

She flung herself at me. I knocked her down. She fastened her teeth into my calf. I forced open her jaws by pressing my fingers on her cheeks so that they were bruised against her teeth. She let go and I hit her with my open hand, knocking her flat again.

" Fool! " I said. " Did you think you would not be caught? "

She got up and slunk off in the darkness. I was left with the little horn in my hand. I was ashamed, but not entirely. I have often thought of it since. Then, in that moment, I had been more man, more male than ever before or since in my life. There had been no thought, no inhibition. Only action. I had known the primitive rut of the past.

For once I had been at one with nature. At one with all male living things that were not men. And I had saved Helen from a poisoner. There was no need for regret. The milk of disgrace was spilt.

In our world, the civilized world of today, it was rape. In the world into which we had dropped, it was nature in violent operation. The primal act in its most savage context . . .

Trembling and shivering in her room, Marie-Thérèse felt nothing. Only the aches of her beating, the pulse of her wild blood. She was conscious of the great truth that women were doomed to be mastered by men, as no mare or bitch, as no baboon is mastered. Woman's only defence against superior strength, poison, had been taken from her. But she was in no way dissatisfied. Nearer to the earth than a man, she felt that something had been done, something that corresponded to the onslaught of the savage rain upon the soft, tilled soil. Hers was the wisdom of the ancient people, the Africans to whom all increase was one.

With the white part of her mind she knew that there would be regrets, that there would be presents. With that knowledge, with the happiness of blackmail gifts to come, with her body now relaxed, satiated with the events of the night, she slept dreamlessly as a child.

The last thing Henry said before he left in the truck to see the Chef de District and explain what had happened was: " Don't forget the bull." As if I were likely to.

I said, " I'll do him tomorrow."

There was nothing much to it, although he was a big chap. Three years old. And I'd have to arrange to get some other cattle into the kraal with him. I had twenty oxen sent up and got out the burdizzos. We used them for castrating rather than a knife. They are large, heavily nickel-plated pinchers that work like bolt cutters. They are remarkably practical, easy to use, and function by so

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compressing the nerves and arteries that they atrophy. I tested them with a bit of string that I folded into a piece of brown paper. I closed the pinchers on it and when I opened it the string was cut and the paper intact. In practice they do not cut the cords. They merely press them flat.

There was no great need to try them out, but it was a precaution that I always took. The great advantage of this instrument is the fact that the operation is quick, almost painless, and completely bloodless.

The bull was standing in the kraal with the two young oxen who had kept him company for the three months we had been trying to build him up. He seemed to have put on no weight, but his two young friends were as fat as butter.

I told the boys to bring in the oxen. They drove them in and began to move them round. The bull joined them, easily distinguishable by his greater size, the hump on his back, and the disdainful look in his eyes. He was still a bull.

I looped one of the new game riems over the end of a long bamboo and went in to the cattle. The boys speeded them up a little. I ran beside the bull, the riem trailing behind me like a snake, with four boys following it. I held my bamboo against the bull's near hind leg. When he put his foot in the loop, I struck, lying back on the riem. The boys picked up the slack. We had him. The bull's hind leg was pulled out behind him, but he dragged us. If he managed to turn he'd charge and we'd have to bolt for the rails.

Four other boys now popped another riem over his horns. Now he was held at both ends and we eased him towards a heavy post that was set in concrete in the centre of the kraal. The boys at his head took a couple of turns round the double ring of No. 8 wire, which lay on the ground by the stump, surrounding it. They brought the bull's head up to the wire ring and made him fast. I threw another riem over his back and caught the ring that lay on his off side, poking it towards me with a stick, and put my end through it. I now had a running noose round his belly. As I pulled it tight, he sank on to his knees and then went over with a bellow of fury.

As he fell, the boys turned his head upwards so that his horns were on the ground. The other boys pulled his tail up over his thigh, holding it there while they lashed his hind legs together and then pulled them out.

I knelt by his belly with the pinchers and was about to put them on the nearest cord when I heard the riem snap. As I put my arm up to protect my eyes, the bull brought both his legs back together and kicked. He cut open my forearm and sent me sprawling. Or at least that is what I was told had happened.

As far as I knew I had been about to cut him one minute, and the next—it was actually about fifteen minutes later—I was lying on my bed with Helen beside me. My arm was bandaged. There was a basin of bloody and dirty water on the floor beside her.

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Helen had a half glass of brandy in her hand. It was my tooth-brush glass. The bottle was on the table. She was looking at me queerly. As if I were a child, tenderly. Her lips, soft, moist, and shiny, were parted, her mouth partly open. I stared into it as if it were a flower. Into its dark pink depths petalled with white teeth. She pushed the glass into my face, spilling some of the brandy over me. I took a gulp and sat up.

"You're better," she said, with a kind of sigh. The glass fell from her hand and rolled on the floor. It did not break. I remember thinking what a good thing it did not break, as if it would have mattered.

"You're better," she said again.

Of course I am, I thought. What a silly thing to say.

Then she said, "I thought you were dead."

"That bloody bull," I said.

Two tears hung poised in the corners of her eyes. I wished they would run down her face and not stay there in that silly way.

I sat up. Her face was close to mine. Very close. I saw myself reflected in her eyes as if they were mirrors. I saw the room behind us. Everything was distorted, the reflection convex, as it is in those mirrors one sometimes finds in an amusement park, or as a room is reflected if you stare into the round belly of a silver teapot. I had often done this as a child when my mother had a party and used her best tea service. It was fascinating.

Helen's eyes grew larger. I felt her breath on my face. Then I

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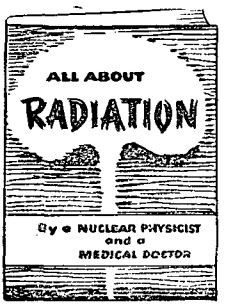

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had her in my arms. Now I've done it, I thought. The inevitable had happened, or was about to happen. The whole thing was unpremeditated, a single complete experience that continued without pause. I do not know how she came to me. There was no resistance, no acquiescence. The arm does not acquiesce when it raises food to the mouth in a natural reflex of hunger. There was just strange fulfilment, a release. It was as if, after a dark night, the sun had risen.

She walked slowly out of the room. " I'll make some tea," she said. " That's what you want now, tea and aspirin."

Tea and an aspirin. The universal remedies of the British middle class for all events that are paranormal—remedies equally for death or passion. How banal. How odd. In half an hour I had passed from the danger of death into the sin of adultery.

I was in love. And I was loved. I had seen it in her eyes. Something irrevocable had taken place. It was strange to love someone so simple, so innocent. For whatever her experiences had been they had not touched her. She was like a child. A half-educated child at that.

I got up, combed my hair with my left hand, and wiped my face with my washrag. My shoulder was very stiff. I did not feel any pain in my arm. I decided it was still too bruised. Then I went into the other room.

Helen smiled at me. " I made it myself," she said, as if making tea were an accomplishment. " The water was boiling."

It certainly tasted better than the tea the boys made.

Emile came in. " Monsieur is O.K.? " he said.

" I'm O.K.," I said. It always made me laugh to hear him say O.K. He had just picked up the expression.

" It was a sad moment, monsieur, when they brought you in. For my part I thought you croaked."

" Takes more than a bull to kill me," I said. Then I said, " And the bull? "

" O.K.," he said. " The boys do it. He eating, monsieur. He not know he bull no more." He went into roars of laughter. " Ha ha," he said. " A man he know, a bull he not know."

" That's enough, Emile," I said. " I'll call you when I want you."

" O.K., monsieur." He was still chuckling.

Helen's eyes were downcast. Her long lashes lay curved upwards on her cheeks. I knew she was thinking that one did not talk about these things. Not in Golders Green.

Butter would not have melted in her mouth. She was always like that after it happened, and it happened often. She came to me, eager as a doe. Walking daintily, prettily, and when it was over she was calm again, suburban, a different woman—composed, still, sitting with her hands folded in her lap, back in the daydream world from which I had aroused her. It was as if now and again she put on her hat, left the house, and went into a walled garden to pick the flowers of love. Now she was arranging them in the

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vase of her memory. When they were withered she would go out to pick some more.

This was her strange duality. I got the idea that apart from her love for me and her satisfaction she enjoyed deceiving Henry, that she hated him, that she was paying him back in the only coin she knew for his jokes and tricks, for his insects and lizards, for other things she never told me about. That she felt in some way that he who laughs last laughs best. I got the idea that Henry had raised a devil in her, that wickedness must beget wickedness, as violence begot violence.

For now I felt Henry to be wicked. Perhaps this was mere self-justification. Perhaps I felt that I did no wrong in taking the woman he abused. All I know is that I took her.

We would sit and look at each other and then get up and go into the bedroom. The strange thing, looking back on it now, is the lack of viciousness, even of sensuality, though the situation was sensual enough, God knows. It had a kind of primal innocence. The death of the imprisoned man and the marching of the ants had affected her profoundly. Its horror, her husband's attitude to the tragedy—it was almost impossible to exaggerate the effect of such an event on a small, not very powerful feminine mind. This death had done something to her soul. To the roots of her personality. Till now, I do not think she had realized the insecurity of life here, or the forces arrayed against mankind on the Equator. The talk of leopard-men and the like had had no reality.

We did not worry about the boys. Nothing could be kept from them anyway, but no African ever tells what he has seen to a white man. Besides, they had no love for Henry and probably enjoyed seeing him cuckolded. As for Marie-Thérèse, there we just took our chance. I felt she would be afraid to tell Henry because, true or false, he would beat her.

Helen dressed my arm twice a day. It did not turn septic. She rubbed my shoulder with embrocation. I still associate its turpentiny smell with her, with the rubbing of her soft hands.

When I was with her, her eyes never left my face. I watched her dress and undress. I marvelled at the beauty of her white, slim body. At the beauty of her small, firm breasts when she raised her arms to arrange her hair. At the perfection of her thighs and belly.

It was now, though I did not know it then, that I began to seek for truth and beauty in woman, seeking to possess both when I took her body in my arms. There must be other men like me who confuse a beautiful woman with God. Who worship her. Love flowed over us, overwhelming us like a river, like a flood . . .

And we both knew that Henry would be away for two days more—then he would come back.

★ ***The last part of Mamba, by Stuart Cloete, appears in next month's Argosy on sale August 9***

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ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

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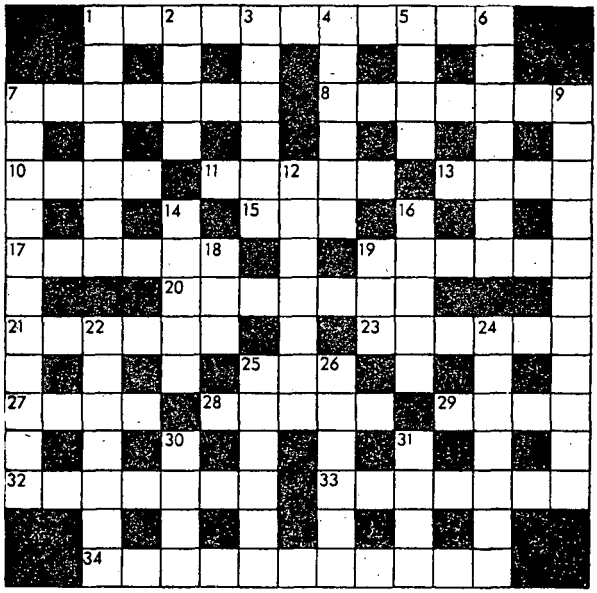
Solution on Page 99



★

CLUES

Across

1 Lordly dish (5, 2, 4).

7 Fish to recall her fiancé's gift (7).

8 Musical account ? (7).

10 True coin (4).

11 Stone or berry (5).

13 The knight holds in a ruler (4).

15 I should be capital without one (3).

17 Found among the nomad riders (6).

19 Famous brothers took to flight (6).

20 Given a lift, sometimes unanimously (7).

21 Arachne's warp (6).

23 "Scorning the base —— by which he did ascend" (Shakespeare) (6).

25 Before the tee it makes a sofa (3).

27 One of John Peel's hounds (4).

28 Fiend, to put the lady soldier in the san (5).

29 Group of horses found in collars (4).

32 Curb roof, of Scots parsonage ? (7).

33 Fat-tailed duck? (7).

34 Pot iced clam, but it's tricky (11).

Down

1 Saintly dog (7).

2 Way often called permanent (4).

3 Do go on ; turn round, it's useless (2, 4).

4 Book size used as flooring ? (6).

5 All singly (4).

6 Suitable work for a dressmaker (7).

7 Scatter-brained but full of spirit (5-6).

9 Had the glide become delirious ? (5-6).

12 He appreciates good cheer (7).

14 Gripping sins (5).

16 "—— is Heaven's first law" (Pope) (5).

18 Quick tap from a flatfish (3).

19 Wanted without ant (3).

22 Severe plague (7).

24 Do drivers here long for 26 ? (7).

25 Suitable wood for sabots ? (6).

26 Old Scottish salt surfaces well (6).

30 Breeding place, if 29 (4).

31 Surfeit back in the tulgey wood (4).

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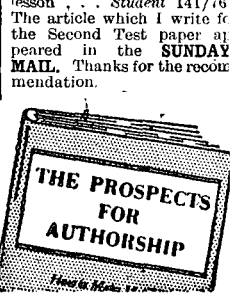
Student 357/3015: I have ha my story accepted by **BLACI WOODS** who are paying n £25 for it. . *Student* 778/2115 I thought it might interest yo to know that **THE COUNTR MAN** has accepted a sho article of mine on an o country custom . . . *Stude* 184/315: As you suggeste I submitted the articles to th **NEW STATESMAN.** One wa published on the 17th Jul I have also had an artic accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . *Student* 181/282: You may l interested to hear that I ha a letter from the Editor, **ARGOSY**; they offered m Twenty-five Guineas for m story . . . *Student* 591/287 You will be pleased that m article submitted for m Second Lesson was publishe in the **DAILY MIRROR** and received Six Guineas for it . . *Student* 120/288: I hav established contact with th Editor of **PUNCH.** The iten was accepted for "Charivaria and is a good start . . . *Studen* 1179/347: I succeeded i getting four Big Game storie into **COURIER** and anothe about "Shrove Tuesday. Another article appeared i the August issue of **BLACK WOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/15 I have just corrected a proo of my story for **WID WORLD**: they have sinc accepted another and I hav sent in a third . . . *Studer* 171/162: I have sold my stor to **EVERYWOMAN** for 2 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156 The B.B.C. accepted the scrip for the Light Programme— fee 9 guineas—after my firs lesson . . . *Student* 141/76 The article which I write fo the Second Test paper ap peared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recom mendation.



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